

Department of Social Sciences

Division of Humanities

The Indigenous History and Colonial Politics of Torres Strait:

Contesting Culture and Resources from 1867 to 1990

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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

Signature:

Date:

Abstract

The aim of my study is to comprehend why there is a significant gap in the economic development of Torres Strait. It questions why it is that Torres Strait Islanders as a whole remain largely economically unproductive in their present situation in contrast to the political beliefs of Islanders and their struggles for self-determination. It questions why Island leaders continue to accept policies of external control even though the guidelines for self development maintain the situation, rather than transforming it. Thus this thesis examines contemporary and traditional history of the Torres Strait in order to analyse and evaluate the development of the political structures of the Islands and how colonialism has influenced the politics of Torres Strait Islanders. I sift through the recorded layers of myths and legends for my interpretation and analyse the ethnographic accounts about Torres Strait from past archival reports, academic literature and the oral accounts from interviews. From the local media, I have examined the recent views of both the contented and discontented Islanders and other people reported in the local *Torres News*. From these records, I bring into perspective the historical processes of a capitalist economic system which has so deeply penetrated Islander culture. Commencing in the 1860s, at the onset of the Torres Strait beche-de-mer and pearl shell industry, the system has so failed Torres Strait Islanders' social development that it moved Islander leaders in the 1980s to push for cessation from Australia and, in the mid 1900s to seek "autonomy and self government" to remain within the Australian political system. In this thesis, I use this evidence to bring into perspective the concept of development with awareness to the colonial history of Torres Strait in comparison with oral history interpreted as the culture of my people. The theme my thesis implicates the contestation between Torres Strait Islanders and governments who impose administrative policies through the Islander system of political representation (regarding Islander culture and resources).

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Chapter One

Torres Strait Islanders and Social Change

Introduction

This thesis is a case study of the journey by Torres Strait Islanders to understand their contemporary situation. Its purpose is to explore the Islanders' position in a rapidly changing Torres Strait and in the wider context of a changing global situation. At the local level, Torres Strait Islanders have moved from having control of their own lives, to living under a colonial administration and then to their current situation where they have in principle, exercised a form of limited local autonomy under a State and Federal system for Indigenous self-development. My argument will examine how the isolation and geography of the Islands was supportive of, and gave a particular pattern to colonial control, permitting Torres Strait Islanders to be decision makers in domestic matters while limiting their involvement in their quest for self-determination. One theme is the extent of local autonomy or self-government which is spurred on by the institutionalised politics of "progression", thus making my study holistic in its approach from an external and internal perspective.

By the mid-eighteenth century, European powers were expanding their interests into the Pacific seeking new territories and resources.¹ The traditional Torres Strait Islanders had already acquired advanced spatial knowledge and skills of navigation enabling them to sail great distances within their culture area (Beckett 1987, p. 26). The Islanders' navigational knowledge made it possible to access marine resources for their subsistence and this marine knowledge evolved into and created a market for trade and exchange of traditional commodities with trading partners on the periphery. The distance travelled and the nature of specific trade goods for exchange required considerable planning, including extensive understanding of sea routes. The Islanders' specialised skills in sailing much larger dugout canoes (50 meter crafts) for open sea manoeuvres in complex tidal and weather conditions had evolved through a

¹ According to Wolf "The Portuguese pioneered the sea routes into Asian waters, and Dutch, English, and French companies and private traders soon followed in the wake" (Wolf 1982, p. 259).

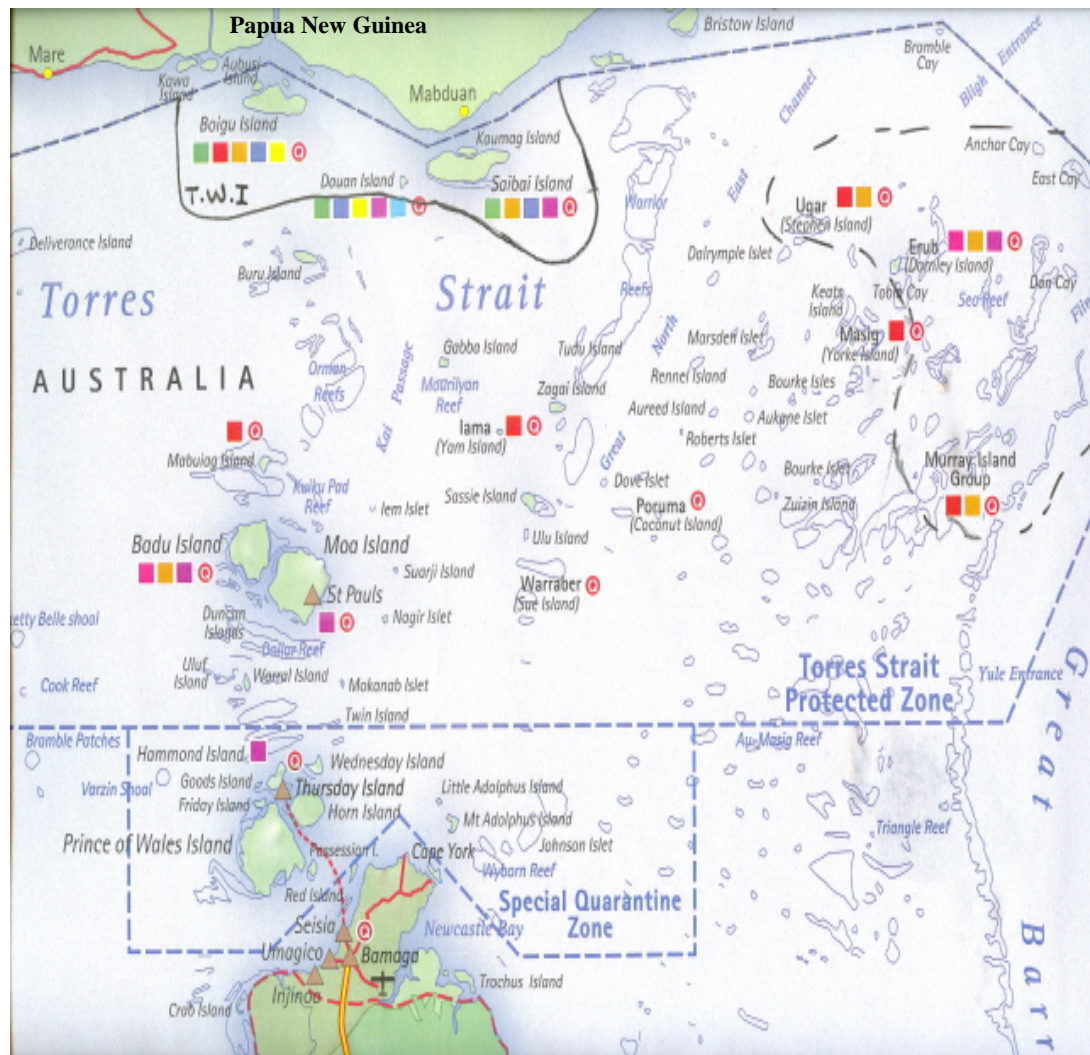
long period of time as unique local knowledge. Through trade and exchange, the Islander's maritime skills supplemented each Island group with access to a wide variety of goods and materials. This local knowledge and character of the Torres Strait Islanders' traditional sea skills have been an advantage for Islanders social mobility and development. However, this has not always been the case; when the Islands were colonised by Queensland, they were incorporated at the periphery of capitalist development and Islanders' traditional knowledge and skills were recognised and used only as a convenient aid for the colonists' economic and political interests. The socioeconomic status of Torres Strait Islanders was to be working class at best.

Torres Strait and Torres Strait Islanders

The Islands of the Torres Strait number over seventy and are situated in the northern waters between Papua New Guinea and Cape York of the Australian mainland. Most present day Islanders are descended from the traditional people of Torres Strait with kinship connections to the south coastal region of Papua New Guinea and Cape York (Australian mainland) and others from a global setting that are, or have been residents on these Islands. The main inhabited Islands, called by their traditional names were divided geographically into administrative groups when Torres Strait became part of Queensland in 1879. Mer (Murray Is), Erub (Darnley Is), Ugar (Stephens Is), are the north-eastern group. Masig (Yorke Is), Poruma (Coconut Is), Waraber (Sue Is), Naghir (Mt Ernest) and Iama (Yam Is), make up the central groups of Islands. Moa (Banks Is), Badu (Mulgrave Is), Mabuiag (Jervis Is) are the Western Group and three topmost Islands that border Papua New Guinea are Boigu (Talbot Is), Dauan (Mt Cornwallis Is) and Saibai. They are the north-western group. Captain Bligh on his second voyage to Tahiti in 1792 gave most of the Islands their English names (Haddon 1935, p. 5) (see figure 1). The recent addition to this group for administrative purposes is the most southern Torres Strait Islander communities as recognised by the Queensland Government's *Community Services (Torres Strait Islander) Act 1984*. They are Bamaga and Seisia on the Australian mainland at Cape

York and Hammond, Horn and Thursday Islands situated north of Cape York². Geographically, these are the recognised Islands of Torres Strait according to both the Commonwealth Government of Australia and the State of Queensland. Torres Strait Islanders residing in the other States and Territories of Australia are not included in such an arrangement.

Figure 1: Map of Torres Strait Islands



(Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry: 'Northern Australia Quarantine Fact Sheets' 2004)

² The Shire of Torres Strait is local government on Thursday Island and has its shire boundary extends over a number of Island in the southern district inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reserves. The administration of the Shire of Torres Strait is not discussed in this thesis as its history is voluminous and beyond the capacity of this study.

Prior to annexation in 1879 by the state of Queensland, the inhabitants had experienced the impact of social change from the arrival of different cultures to Torres Strait. The influx was in response to commodity exploitation (the harvesting of pearl shells and other marine products in large quantities) that started in the 1860s and continued to the 1900s. The introduction of different cultures significantly modified traditional Islanders as they accommodated change and adaptation that reflect diversity in way of life, namely the *Ailan Kastom* (Beckett 1987; Sharp 1993).

Major Objectives of this Study

The thesis is presented in a way to show that Torres Strait Islanders were the victims of progress when they accepted the new ways and ideas from outside. They confronted change and development through a complex set of responses and adaptations and have responded accordingly to change as it affected their ways of life. The study comprehends the internal dynamics of colonialism and its implications on Islander population as a whole and so allows me to demonstrate how colonial officials, missionaries, merchants and seamen became agents of change in two ways. Firstly, Islanders were forced into contact with the influx of European, Pacific and Asian customs by various rewards and punishments, and secondly, Islanders accepted controlled directions in their social and economic life, which changed their cultural life, so that, the core components of traditional lifestyle of an Islander are now a memory, lost in the social changes that have shaped contemporary Islander life influential of its predecessors.

The study examines various literatures along with recorded interviews of Islander participants. This approach of combining sources is my method of examining the “developmental” history of Torres Strait. It begins with an assessment of the current political administration situation in Torres Strait and examines it from the different perceptions of those Island leaders who propose modern development in the name of progress and others (Island leaders) who wish to reclaim traditional values and attitudes whilst not denying the modern world. Those leaders who support modern development in Torres Strait, define it as a socioeconomic issue and argue “you have to be a smart man to be a councillor these days; not like before” (Beckett 1987, p. 199) using *Ailan Kustom* to their advantage in ways to maintain both cultural continuity and cultural diversity and act accordingly, without stepping out of line

with the institutional guidelines of government. In the local vernacular, they are the Islander leaders who ‘*don’t growl govman*’ (in fear of government reprisals). Instead, their initiatives have indentured local Islanders in Torres Strait to welfareism and institutional control according to Ailan Kustom. Within this logic, I examine and interpret the history of my people to make an analytical representation of how Islanders perceive their history from a local perspective. My main intention here is to examine critically the historical and contemporary evidence in order to make available arguments so that my people have the opportunity to read this, may gain a broad and useful insight to understand their history. This is a reflective academic assessment produced by a Torres Strait Islander.

Social Change

Most of this chapter focuses on the Islands of Torres Strait and questions the direction of the current welfare economy being managed by the ICCs, (Island Community Councils). In conjunction with the other southern community groups, the northern Islands of Torres Strait are totally dependent from a selection of services made available by the State and Commonwealth Governments. Moreover, the Island Councils has local government status to provide for the well-being of its community residents, making by-laws, infrastructure development and essential services. At present, the channelling of government funds controls Islanders in three ways through their local “representivity” agencies: the ICCs (Island Community Councils), the ICC (Island Coordinating Council) and the TSRA (Torres Strait Regional Authority). The functions of the ICC and TSRA consist of the following. The ICC, a Queensland Government State agency has 17 Chairpersons of the Island Councils with one representative (Chairperson) from the Islander reserve of Tamwoy on Thursday Island. The ICC advise the Queensland Governments and other entities on issues affecting Islander progress and social cultural matters and make recommendations to the State Minister in regards to the administration of the Islands through legislation known as *The Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984*.

At a regional level, the TSRA, Commonwealth Government agency represents the interests of Islanders and Aboriginals to all governments; the Local, the State and the Commonwealth in ways to improve the economic, social and cultural status of its constituents; Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginals in the region of Torres Strait.

The TSRA members composed of the 18 representatives from the ICC plus two member representatives from communities on the Horn/Prince of Wales Islands and the Port Kennedy communities on Thursday Island. The appointments of Islander member representatives on the State and Commonwealth agencies are legislated in the *Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984* of Queensland and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* (ATSIC). They are the representative and advisory bodies for Torres Strait Islander affairs in Torres Strait whose directives comes from the local ICCs, based mostly on a common goal for Islander self determination or a greater autonomy. Moreover, all three agencies depend largely on both the State and Commonwealth Governments for their source of income for major infrastructure development, and are responsible fiscally to both governments.

This model of administration contains past practises with modern alterations to accommodate representivity to governments when elected by their constituents as Chairpersons on Island Councils. Methodically, it reflects the conventional system of administration or indirect rule as introduced by the colonial authorities in 1879. It was a method of administration that was systematically introduced by colonial authorities into Torres Strait communities as a way of controlling Islander affairs by replacing the authority of traditional chiefs or headman with the Mamoose system³ (Sharp, 1993, pp. 130 - 134). In the 1904, the Queensland Government took control of the outer Islands and replaced the Mamoose system by merging of Islander administration and culture with Aboriginal affairs under the total control of the Protector of Aborigines. This system was later restored for Islanders to semi-manage their own affairs into the 1980s encompassing current administrative practises.

It is within this framework; I explore the progress in Torres Strait by examining the Islanders' past involvement in the lucrative European industry of pearling and beche-de-mer. I do this by evaluating both the success and failure of Torres Strait Islanders under colonial control and compare this with their current status as beneficiaries of social welfare programs. This dependency is ironic and I argue that an understanding

³ A similar colonial administration system was used in the 1950s in Papua New Guinea by the Australian Government: "To foster a series of centralised native authorities by appointing village officials endowing them with certain powers and jurisdiction over tribal areas [known as luluais]" (Essai 1961, pp. 36 - 37).

of the present can only emerge by understanding the colonial conditioning of Torres Strait Islanders through an analysis of the political system that hindered Islander progress in the past and how it has continued to its current state of affairs.

Self-Determination or Institutionalisation

In their present situation, recognition for all Torres Strait Islanders has been constrained by the “*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989*” (*ATSIC Act 1989*: 147) enacted in 1989 by the Commonwealth of Australia. With the support of Island leaders in Torres Strait for a new federal commission, the outcome of the *ATSIC Act 1989* contained legislation that separated total Torres Strait Islander social and economic issues by geographic and administrative divisions; mainland Torres Strait Islander and Torres Strait Islanders in the Strait⁴. The large numbers of Islanders who live on the Australian mainland are disempowered by the *ATSIC Act* and are not expected by the Island leaders to be involved in politics of the homeland. Mainland Torres Strait Islanders issues are represented by the *ATSIC* (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) regional councils on the mainland. However, special provisions were included in the *ATSIC Act 1989* to accommodate Torres Strait Islanders as a whole with the establishment of the Office of Torres Strait Islander Affairs and the Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board. Both were established to monitor and advise the Federal government on “furthering the social, economic and cultural advancement of Torres Strait Islanders (*ATSIC*, 1987, pp. 4 – 52).

In time, the *ATSIC* was not an effective mechanism for mainland Torres Strait Islanders in terms of economic independence, and mainland Islanders’ endeavoured to maintain their separate identity and distinct culture. They (mainland Islanders) continued to maintain ongoing kinship and communal ties with their people in the Islands, and identified themselves with the tradition and culture of Torres Strait. Most Islanders in the Torres Strait are recipients of a welfare economy enmeshed in local Island politics by provision of government agencies, which employs others Islanders to deliver services to the local communities. Overtly, Island leaders have

⁴ It is important to note that *ATSIC* on the mainland was abolished in March 2005. However, the Torres Strait Regional Authority continues to operate in Torres Strait despite legislative changes in Indigenous Affairs 2005. This thesis deals with evidence collected prior to the enactment.

undertaken to provide Torres Strait Islanders social and economic stability in their homelands. In Torres Strait, Islanders of voting age and the elderly who are less involved in local politics are at a loss to understand what avenues or policy directions are possible under the representative system of the Islands to Governments.

As time has progressed, non-economic stability for Torres Strait Islanders have led and evolved into an ongoing silent or visible protest from concerned Islanders who rely on community development for their income. Non-economic stability has generated intense resentment by Islanders who perceive representative politics as being cynically used by some Island leaders to act in their community's interest to access continued fiscal support⁵ from government. As an example, the following quote is a response from a TSRA member to unhappy Islanders in regards to the Commonwealth's Torres Strait Major Infrastructure Program:

We are here to consult with our communities and articulate what their needs are as well as provide leadership to ensure that those matters addressed for the benefit of our community as a whole. It is our duty then, to stand strong and represent the interests of the silent majority to ensure that their needs are not dismissed and overlooked because of the few make loudest noise. We do not dismiss any view because that is what a democracy is all about. However we are here to represent our people and ensure that our rights as Torres Strait Islanders are recognised and our capacity to run our own affairs is increased. The TSRA will spend \$50.719 million in delivering programs under its outputs to the Torres Strait region in the year 2002 – 2003 Financial Year. At the TSRA, we promote an accountable, transparent and collaborative approach to regional development. Our track record and achievements in progressing Torres Strait affairs since 1994 demonstrates the value of this approach (*Torres News*, 7 – 13 February 2003, p. 14).

However, in the current political development of the Islands, many Torres Strait Islanders are becoming increasingly confident and assertive of their rights as a separate cultural and social identity. Protest about the lack of consultation has led Islander youths in the local paper to demonstrate: "We are tomorrow's leaders and we need to be included in the discussions and decisions that are made now" (*Torres News*, 23 – 29 August 2002, p. 5). Overall, Islanders are no longer content to be a marginalised group of people in the Australian system of representation. As they travelled the world they ingest new traits from other Indigenous nations and

⁵ From my perspective, continued fiscal support relates to the on-going government spending to accommodate the special needs of the people in the outer Torres Strait Islands. The term is considered in relation to past governments' policies of paternalistic control over Islander affairs and interpreted as a mean of decreasing and not supportive of Torres Strait Islanders self-reliance.

globalisation; Islanders are now demanding from the Australian government a reasonable share of the social and economic prosperity as their birthright of being Torres Strait Islanders. This raises questions of what criteria are choices about political and economic futures being made and on whose information and knowledge do Island leaders and Island people make on political and policy choices? The answer may lie in training future generations of Torres Strait Islanders who are encouraged to participate in government programs as such that according to Mr Braddy, Employment, Training and Industrial Relations Minister “The [Queensland] Government’s efforts to facilitate social equity and enhance training and career development opportunities for indigenous Queenslanders were paying dividends” (as cited in the *Torres News*, 22 - 28 October, 1999). The Minister goes on to say:

Through direct support of its Skills Centre Program, the Government is keen to provide indigenous communities better health, education, cultural reinforcement and the capacity for self-management. Three new indigenous Skills Centres across the State benefited from a \$2.4 million allocations of funds in 1998 – 99 to provide direct support to indigenous communities and encourage young people to take up training to increase their prospects of employment (Ibid).

From my perspective, criteria and choices for Torres Strait Islanders advancement are the representative responsibilities of Islanders’ leadership. However, it seems their knowledge of the internal system of politics has inevitably functioned ideologically to exploit cultural interests namely, the Ailan Kastom of Torres Strait Islanders for contemporary improvements. So far, it has hampered the ability of many Torres Strait Islanders to participate in full scale economic enterprises and gain, in particular from the marine resources for national and international markets. And, in their current striving for self-determination, the Islands are in absence of an economic base and not self-resourced. The Island communities are dependent on government services for employment and as means to address their social and welfare needs. Dependency has made most Islanders less willing to challenge governments, whilst others see themselves as part of the broader struggle of the world’s Indigenous peoples for self-recognition. They are the ones who continue their protests through local and national forums for support or air their grievances through the local radio station or in the local newspaper. While that struggle has become orientated towards culture and heritage (traditional ownership) of Torres Strait, the Federal and State Governments in accepting Torres Strait Islanders’ cultural diversity and history, have

continued to implement legislative and fiscal control to maintain the status quo through a controlled budget for Indigenous affairs.

According to Sansom's (1985, p. 90) assessment of Island politics and representivity, he states that: "With the decline of the marine industry Torres Strait politics has increasingly focused on the distribution of government funds [and] 'today,' government funds are to be gained by plural representation". From my perspective, it seems the "political representivity" of Torres Strait reflects an era when my people became subjects to "The supervision of exclusion" (Sharp 1993, pp. 131 - 132), under Aboriginal Affairs in the 1930s⁶ by indirect rule. It was a period that allowed the social forces of change (the laws of the Protector) being imposed upon Islander society, with its powers extended to certain Islanders who are authorised to impose the cultures of others over their people. From my evaluation of the situation, the roles of political representatives (Island leaders) today have not changed; they have attained more status and privileges through their defined positions. They act as the traditional and contemporary decision makers when elected as Chairpersons to chair the Island councils and take on roles and responsibilities in a number of ways. According to Ailan Kastom, they are seen by their Island constituents as the traditional headman to perform as cultural middleman on the ICC and TSRA to represent their communities to governments' and other agencies. In their position as members of Island councils and community representatives on these agencies, they are the political instrument through which the government consults to inject infrastructure development funds throughout the Torres Strait Islands.

In Chapter One, I will point out that time as a human condition has moulded Torres Strait Islanders according to the actions of their Island leaders who are the active participants in the development of Islanders' history. In the past, most Island leaders worked hand in glove with agencies that fostered a "System of administration which evolved under the Queensland government on the Torres Strait Islands and involved the appointment of a Mamoose, [who as subservient to authorities] or chiefs with the assistance of policemen, who would maintain order on the island" (Singe 1989, p. 65). Under the current scheme of "representation", the Islander administration is

⁶ Sharp (1993), characterised the Supervision of the Exclusion to the British colonial practice as *indirect rule* where the local appointee was directly responsible to the Government.

maintained by Island leaders who are voted in by their people and some are appointed by governments to hold various positions of responsibility.

Consequently, the traditional history of the Islands became an ideological construction as a “unique culture” (Pitt 1998) that governments have recognised to be embedded in the politics of Torres Strait. Thus, when Island leaders address the issues of Islander social disadvantage economically, they manipulate Islander custom and cultural symbols to make their point. According to one disgruntled Islander to the *Torres News*:

For Islanders, it is the Mamoose? Or does the title Mamoose mean something else in our Ailan Kastom? Is it the name of a position or a principle the colonisers took hold of and changed to suit their practice of governance, then appointed their own version of Mamoose to a leading position amongst our people? This is a very important question because Ailan Kastom lies at the heart of our struggle of self-determination toward greater autonomy. We know we will come to rely on international law and when that happens, Ailan Kastom would be the basis of our claim for a legitimate form of self-government. Now, you know I am talking about our own system of leadership and governance based on our culture and tradition (K. Savage 2003).

Thus, as Islander custom and cultural symbols became symbolically manipulated by the politics of the Islands’ electoral process, those representatives who have continued to be elected to office were well influenced and under control to continue as advisers on the TSRA and ICC. Summarising the colonial influence of representivity, Beckett (1987, p. 199) says:

The Islander strategy is in part a product of the leaders’ political education in the local government and councillors’ conferences of earlier years, combined with experience in some branch of the government service. This has left them versed in the working on one bureaucracy in its political and personal as well as formal aspects [and] have gained knowledge of the legal and financial issues arising in negotiations, and learned to use white advisers without being controlled by them”.

On the other hand, most Torres Strait Islanders lack internal knowledge on the functional roles of government agencies by supporting their elected leaders who purport (see, *Torres News*, 7 – 13 February 2003, p. 14) that, any improvements in the social and economic condition of Torres Strait Islanders, were the result of their lobbying.

From my perspective, such achievements were gained by using status as the “traditional political representation” and as elected government representatives for their people. The discrepancy is that, whilst Island leaders may have the mandate to argue before governments for Islander’s basic rights and conditions, they do not explain to their constituents that the outcomes of their representation for development came from a national budget on government spending towards essential services to all Australians. These are policies of access and equity developed by the State and Commonwealth Governments for maintaining programs and social order with fiscal responsibilities across the nation.

In the past, colonial administrations played a major role in administering the Islands. This legitimised a process of control that worked against the interest of Torres Strait Islanders for self determination. In its present state of administration, the Islanders’ position reflects a controlled state of affairs for Torres Strait and this is exhibited amongst Island leaders who by reverse role-play instigate Islander’s autonomy as the agenda with government support. It agrees with the notion of an earlier colonial expansion as history shows, that it was the Queensland government’s original claim based on humanitarian grounds (protecting Islanders), when it annexed Torres Strait in 1879. From an historical point of view, it is in this framework, I intend to inform my people of their history:

For Queensland to have control of the whole of Torres Strait, and that it was ‘strongly influenced by humanitarian consideration’ ... the 1879 annexation was a Colonial Office initiative ... Although Queensland had little choice but to accept what was in effect an imperial directive, it was not prepared to make the financial commitment necessary to ensure that the Islanders were protected by the colonial laws” (cited in Mullins, 1994, p. 139).

Methods and Positions

The local history (consciousness) of my people has assisted in my research by combining traditional knowledge with the Western interpretation of Torres Strait culture. The thesis is written from the perspective of a Torres Strait Islander who has spent considerable time out of the geographic confines of the Islands while remaining active within Islander society on mainland Australia and through network with other Islanders in the Torres Strait. Although Islander voices in the past have often been translated in ways that were palatable to European interpretations and values, there are significant distortions in the anthropological, historical and

sociological literatures about Torres Strait Island society. Often, some outside academic studies have scribed to the oppositional views of outsiders, rather than to take into account the history and experience of Islanders in their struggles for self determination.⁷

In contrast, my experience of writing a previous thesis on the life of one historical Torres Strait figure has prompted both a methodology and the motivation to continue to write about the Torres Strait.⁸ Accordingly, research has taken me through the various archives of government institutions in the eastern states including the Torres Strait Islands. In addition, Torres Strait elders residing in New South Wales and Queensland were also interviewed for their local knowledge of the Island's traditional practices and customs. I interviewed them about their involvement in the Islands' struggles for development⁹.

Interpreting Islander History as Historical Truth

Social change plays a part in building new morals supported by a system of values in situations of cultural contact and culture change and oral communication is naturally an important part of Torres Strait society. In general, it can be said that the Islanders' versions of events are their history and the perception of outsiders about how they perceived these primary presentations has been a subject for critique by recent scholars who supports that "Oral tradition consists of all verbal testimonies which are reported statements concerning the past" (Vansina, 1965, p. 19).

In my interviews, local informants have frequently questioned the credibility of their ancestor's command of the English language. Did the ancestors understand the outsiders' instructions when the ancestors delivered their accounts of cultural values and practises for recording purposes, and how, it is reinterpreted by outsiders? Recorded here as oral history is an Islander testament about the issue of viewpoint:

⁷ Lawrence (1991) informs us that "Records, such as the writing of missionaries, traders, and colonial officials, are usually the result of superficial contact between the two groups – lacking clear understanding of each other's social and economic practises"(Lawrence 1991, p. 5).

⁸ My field research in Torres Strait for my Honours' thesis (1998) encouraged me to examine the history of the Islands as a MA thesis.

⁹ In terms of development and Torres Strait, it reflects the Islanders' struggles in trying to bring about change and be self-reliant on their own terms, or from the surrounding natural marine resources; to improve their living conditions free of government handouts and control.

George. The question I'm going to ask is, because I am writing this oral history of Torres Strait and Colonial Politics and I call you because according to our custom sake au, you gnau aude, my uncle au?

Wa! (Yes!)

George. Ar what do you say? Or firstly the history of Torres Strait were written by non Torres Strait Islanders way back in the past,

Wa! (Yes!)

George. This history which is now being used as the major focus point for anything when they want to write about the Torres Strait so what do you think of anthropological expedition or anthropologists who have come up here before or historians and historians who have written about Torres Strait history and culture?

Participant. Ezzo (Thank You).

Ezzo George, the ar --- the question you ask is ar is, is a household question for Torres Strait Islanders, since ar Haddon ar back ina 1800 led ar Cambridge Anthropological Expedition into Torres Strait. The ar it had tremendous pressure ar on the oral history of the Torres Strait, since that time up until now. Wa the impact ar and distress, I mean social impact, in other words I go elaborate it ar a bit further meaning dis kine when informants at that time were they were called, regarded or refer to as informants by non indigenous anthropologists at the time as people giving information or in termed ar -- or sorry like mediators or interpreters. So every time Indigenous ar people blo yume Torres Strait Islanders were interpreting ar-ar their worldview, their Indigenous worldview, they had to find words or they had to search for words and one of the difficulties was that. Of course that they didn't speak ar the English say fluently and (Haddon) he was a person ar asking them question who only had spent ar just number of weeks with them ar coming back for his background, his background was from an academic ar wanem ar setting.

Sometimes information got ar that the meanings wasn't clear enough so ar because of probably of money situation and wamen ya timeline some of the documentation that took place, wa were not properly documented because maybe the non indigenous people ar I feel at times probably were in a hurry or under pressure. So they just took information for the best of their knowledge in the way that they understood the interpreters, the Indigenous interpreters at that time. So at that time there were lot of confusions and ar chaos and ar looking back now as an academic a lot of the information ar sometime that I do question are stories that have been wrongly ar documented or very briefly documented.

And sometimes there are few question marks as of stories that are have no relations to the particular stories that been told at that time. So are and then from that time a pattern been set where people used to come in, non indigenous anthropologists used to come in, used to come in to do a research. They come in at a time where, when we were under reserve, where are meaning that we are meaning that Torres Strait Islanders were under government control, so whether you like it or not you had to give that information, and when they gave information are they are they gave it in a way that are they were hoping that one day it will be delivered back to their people (J. W. 2000, pers. comm., July).

This oral account provides an Islander's view on the socio-historical role of past ethnographers. It is an interpretation of traditional and presumably non- or post-traditional situations about Torres Strait Islanders' adaptability to foreign influence. It is in this context I base my study so that my people can interpret their history and may gain some understanding of their history to come to terms with their present situation in Torres Strait. A situation that is a complex mix of sometimes contradictory elements derived both from the traditional pre-colonial mix of culture and influence. It questions the modern habits of Island leaders being displayed as a culture in dissimilarity to the primary custom and tradition of Islander politics, where traditional heritage and custom is acknowledged as precedent.

My approach of incorporating local knowledge with other sources provides an interactive and dynamic understanding of the meaning of development when Islander culture, its people and the myths and legends incorporated as a cultural whole has undergone rapid changes. Social change came in the many forms of institutionalisation experienced by Torres Strait Islanders: colonial interventions, religious education, segregation policies, the loss of traditional lands and, assimilation by partial participation in the world's economy. This has prompted Islanders' movement to restore cultural continuity by their passive and non-passive resistance, and the contents of the thesis are about society and social change.

An Overview of the Thesis

Chapter Two examines some selected theories of social change, examined as an aspect of colonial and capitalist expansion. I do this by sifting through a number of literatures to provide a more global outlook on the revolutionary impact of social change on Indigenous societies. In particular, it examines the literatures about the

Torres Strait, in conjunction with the accounts of others whose approach is well within my method of analysis. Methodically, the relevance here is to bring together as much possible, information to illustrate the history of Torres Strait against the insights of others who have written of similar circumstances.

Chapter Three examines the impact of social and political influence within Islander society. The chapter begins by providing a broad insight into the past administration of the Islands, where colonial influence supported by a religious order became part of the administrative structure. Within the colonial administration, selected Islanders were included for roles as local representatives in the interests of the people. They were favoured by the authorities to act as leaders to represent colonial Queensland, rather than the traditional chief or headman. In this chapter, I show that the present administration of Torres Strait, in particular, the management of Islander affairs is an adopted process of influence for representing the interests of Torres Strait Islanders (political representivity) to both the Commonwealth and State Governments. From my analysis, the present system is a “reflection in the colonial mirror” and according to Beckett (1987, p. 91):

What is certain is that the Islanders came to *use* the doctrines and ideas they had been taught [and their use] may initially have been opportunistic, a means of winning European favour and discomfiting rivals, which would have been encouraged by the authorities’ reliance on local mediators to relay their teachings

The study brings into perspective the welfare politics of the Islands, which Island leaders manipulate into different strategies (social, cultural and economics) and used as a political tool to manipulate their constituents towards a form of self-determination in order to secure a seat for power and control in local affairs. It broadly examines the accounts of others to support my argument that the colonial methods of imposition by “representivity” are a procedure for control. It meant the norm of representation is active and have continued to be visible in the present system of Islander affairs.

Chapter Four examines the transitional period of change, where there was a profound alteration to the Torres Strait traditional lifestyle and culture. This overview examines the period of contact, when Torres Strait Islanders were confronted with new demands on the labour and resources accompanied by new

ideas, Western values and social controls. This was a period when the politics of nation states began to shape much of the world through the colonisation and domination of less powerful societies. It extends to examine the intervention of the missionaries in 1871 and how Islanders' lifestyle was managed under the London Missionary Society (LMS). The accounts of the LMS had shaped their opinions about Islander lifestyle with less attention to the impact of other cultures into Torres Strait during the marine industry.

I will show that the Islander traditional way of life had changed considerably under Christian indoctrination and later to be subjected to the laws of Queensland by indirect methods, since the Islands were annexed in 1879. Thus, by examining alternative sources of evidence, a clearer picture will emerge to compliment the contemporary history of Torres Strait.

Chapter Five introduces oral history from an insiders' perspective, particularly as it interprets the stories in ways, which directly connect Torres Strait Islanders throughout the Islands of Torres Strait. I use oral history and contribute my own memories by sharing the Islander tradition of passing down our stories (the myths and legends). I also recode the account of the past made by elders to illustrate their interpretation of traditional history. I also incorporate accounts that were recorded by Haddon (1935) and others in more recent times and by doing this permit a traditional perspective of Torres Strait Islanders so that readers may gain an insiders' interpretation of the myths and legends of the Islands and provide their own perceptions about Torres Strait Islanders.

Conclusion

The conclusion provides a brief summing up of the arguments underlying and linking the previous chapters. It also brings into perspective that Torres Strait Islanders' knowledge and understanding of how to do things in the footsteps of the predecessors has disappeared. It shows that their present and future is inclusive of the outsiders' assistance to bring forth the Islands and its inhabitants as a producer society. The thesis in ways addressed real-life issues that if contemporary Torres Strait Islanders can see that while they cannot change their predicaments, then by understanding its dynamics they can make real choices about their future. Torres Strait Islanders can see the ways in which how the Torres Strait became not only

incorporated into an Australian political system but into the global economic and cultural world. But, they have been back-grounded and they need to build on this for a better tomorrow. My people can visualise their predicaments that while up to now, incorporation has been at great cost to their economic well-being and cultural identity. The Islands are without an economic base and regional autonomy for Indigenous Islanders is extremely limited given that their socioeconomic state of affairs is the responsibility of governments. Through a better understanding the local and the global Islanders may make choices for achieving both opportunity and identity in the modern world.

Chapter Two

Torres Strait Islanders and Global Society

The major objective of my study is to understand how the external influence of the past leading into the present has significantly shaped the lives of my people, the Torres Strait Islanders. My people remain economically unproductive in their present situation, even when they have an operational political organisation that is characterised as providing local autonomy with representative government. How is it that so many Island leaders currently in power continue to accept policies of *de facto* peripheral control when the result of acting within the constraints of that relationship appears to perpetuate the situation, rather than transform it? If knowledge is a form of power, then what are the sources of knowledge available to ordinary Islanders and their leaders to address a change of consciousness and to initiate a foundation for genuine economic and social progress? An important part of this chapter is to understand social change within a structure that has allowed Islanders to participate and produce partial change in their culture area, Torres Strait.

In this chapter, I examine a number of literatures to find conceptual models to assist me to comprehend the political and social consequences for a developed Torres Strait. It is based on the concepts of autonomy delivered from the representivity roles of selected Islanders, who have influenced their Island communities' future prospects. Since this study is framed within social anthropology, an anthropological approach to economics and politics is broadly used to examine the processes of social change to gain a broader viewpoint from which we can evaluate the significant components of the colonial experience in Torres Strait. In particular, it is a search for both the internal and external factors in the process of change and an attempt to unravel the many forms in which these factors influence and affect Indigenous Torres Strait.

From my point of view, Torres Strait and its inhabitants has been a final frontier for exploration and discovery, which is supported by the "1879 Letters Patent" (Kaye, 1997, p. 138) of colonial Queensland. I demonstrate how colonisation as a general historical process has taken place amid specific development policies for Torres Strait Islanders.

My method of investigation is through a theoretical synthesis followed by an analysis of the significant differences between competing narratives, both ethno-historical and oral traditional about certain important points of Torres Strait history.

In a similar ethnographic way, I examine the “professional” accounts of how culture was maintained and practiced according to custom and tradition against internal “stories” of how the impact of a dominant culture disrupted these local cultural protocols. To gain an understanding of a colonised Islander society, I have used the voices of my people to demonstrate how church ministers and administrators in colonial times used and exploited local cultural knowledge, not as an act of appreciation, but to advance and maintain domination.

The present moment is an opportune one for bringing together the written materials, oral transcripts and written extracts from the local views of Islanders in the *Torres News*. I define my present task as being an archaeologist of meaning and as a privileged insider; I recognise that I have both advantages and disadvantages in being able to sort through the different layers and types of record, in particular, with reference to Torres Strait Islanders.

The anthropological, sociological and historical literature on the subject of social change is voluminous, and an extensive review of it goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Since my aim has been to understand the making of the present as a way of helping my people to consciously participate in shaping their future, I have therefore selected a few sources as the major conceptual and theoretical guides for my exploration. Not only do I find these sources the most effective explanatory tools, but they structure the evidence in a way that is congruent with Islanders’ own interpretations of colonialism. I show how local understandings of the process of colonisation by my people do not always support the written accounts of history.

The Literature

Balandier’s (1965) African ethnography examined the incorporations of traditional economies and societies into dominant capitalist and colonial structures. His analysis of African colonial situations provides both useful explanation and support for my understanding of the processes of colonialism in the history of Torres Strait.

Balandier's point is that the slow process of decolonisation is a phase in the ongoing dialectic of a colonial political economy and a colonised society is particularly relevant.

In the Torres Strait, the current situation is best perceived as a total society but consisting of two groups of people – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Although, the non-Indigenous are numerically a minority group, some are the descendants of a more privileged society in the past and have benefited from an Islander welfare economy to maintain their economic superiority and social difference in Torres Strait. Others are recent migrants from other parts of the state and territory on the Australian mainland, including the public servants and commercial operators as well as those those seeking a sea change.

In the colonial era outsiders symbolically represented the difference in quality of life for local Islanders. Simultaneously the outsiders imposed their ideologies on Islander culture and exploited local labour and resources. These outsiders, in their quest to develop Torres Strait as part of Queensland, produced the politics of colonialism for control. While these outsiders are fewer in number, by virtue of their superiority in technology, political organisation, economic power and religious status, they continue to dominate the system of relationships. In his analysis of the colonial situation, Balandier makes the point that one of the characteristics of a dominated society is that, while the colonised population is superior in numbers, they are subjected to control by a smaller group who are mainly outsiders. For the colonists, the colonised resources are the means for creating wealth and ideologically, because they share only a portion of the proceeds with the dominated locals, conflicts often follow. Balandier noted, "All of a sudden, societies which had hitherto been thought of as static and "repeating themselves" have opened themselves to change and evolution; they have become historical once more; they have ceased to be passive objects" (Balandier 1965, p. 52). His classification of colonial/colonised societies would see Torres Strait Islanders of the 1860s located within those same parameters of colonial domination over the traditional and ideological reconstructions. Over time as Sharp, (1993, p. 183) noted regarding the Islanders' 1936 maritime strike in Torres Strait, "The Protector [for Aborigines] was being belittled in the Brisbane press [and] from Murray Island across to Boigu, the inmates had broken out [to ask]

on whose terms would they work and live, was the question being silently asked”. Although that time has changed, the current socio-economic situation of Islanders remains reliant on a postcolonial-style authority of political representation through government to make significant progress.

Seeking examples of the colonial/colonised in terms of development in other societies, I examined the ethnographic accounts of Dyck (1991) who worked with Canadian First Nations. Dyck examined the historical situation of Indians and institutionalisation within the Canadian society leading him to question the Indian/Canadians’ relationship: “Whatever the precise ‘cause’ of the Indian problem – nature or environment, the presumed ‘superiority’ of Euro – Canadian society was seen to offer quite sufficient justification for its representatives to be empowered to seek appropriate ‘solution’ for Indians and the Indian question” (Dyck 1991, p. 25). Dyck’s assessment of Indian and Euro–Canadian relationship suggests coexistence between the two groups as a better way forward for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of Canada.

The relationship of coexistence, examined by Dyck is underpinned by a concept of political representivity. This is a relationship where representation takes place by nominated spokesperson(s) for the disadvantaged, where the Indian voice is quite effective. A comparison of the ‘Indian problem’ with the Islanders’ situation shows them to be similar, but not the same. In Canada, the government has given status to tribal groups of its First Nation people allowing them to have some control of their lands. In Torres Strait, compulsory voting rights for Torres Strait Islanders give rise to Islander leadership, who not only represent Torres Strait Islanders before governments, but are accountable to government in their capacity as the institutional heads of regional agencies.

Some Torres Strait Islanders perceive their current Islander leaders as working a relationship of collusion with governments. This manifests itself in the ideological principle of Indigenous Islander self-determination with only partial autonomy from their governments in contrast to Indigenous rights as experienced by the First Nations people of Canada. From my readings, it seems that the development of Torres Strait Islanders’ autonomy has not yet reached self-determination. According

to the TSRA Chairperson:

The TSRA has urged both indigenous and national leaders to focus on coexistence not division when discussing indigenous sovereignty in Australia. Speaking at the National Treaty Conference in Canberra this week, TSRA Chairperson, Terry Waia, said indigenous sovereignty already exists at various levels in Australia, and efforts to expand it should focus on coexistence between indigenous and non-indigenous people and achieving real outcomes (*Torres News* 30 August-5 September, 2002).

Although this is representation as accepted by government; my understanding as a Torres Strait Islander is that it serves to reproduce disadvantage for the majority of Islanders through a form of indirect rule. Dyck's (1991) assessment of the Indian/Euro-Canadian relationship is not consistent with the view expressed by the TSRA Chairperson in support of the existing political structure for coexistence and for achieving real outcomes for Islander advancement. From my examination of the Islander situation, the internal political structure in Torres Strait is a hindrance to how local issues should be represented. According to Dyck (1991, p. 98 – 99):

To attempt to explain the unique situation of Indians solely in terms of Canadians' attitudes towards them is to turn a blind eye to the long term impact of a system of tutelage that has not only controlled Indians, but which has also informed the attitudes and actions of those who have served their tutor [and] It has always been influenced by broader political and economic interests.

Dyck (1991) presents his worldview of the Indian/Euro-Canadian relation in a way that similarities can be seen with Island leaders who purport to represent the social position of Torres Strait Islanders, without knowing that they have indebted themselves and their people to the continual welfare services of institutions. Dyck notes, "The problem facing colonial officials and missionaries to reconcile native "reasonableness" and intelligence with what they took to be their own obvious religious, cultural, and economic superiority" (1991, p. 13). Likewise, most of the literature produced in the past about Torres Strait accounts for a European history of exploration and expansion, rather than focusing on an analysis of the social impact of such development on Indigenous potentials for self-development and change. Dyck's appraisal of the Indian situation in Canada warrants further investigation, particularly by those who have examined the Australia's colonial relationship with Indigenous Australia. By comparing Dyck's accounts with Wolf (1982), the internal colonial situation experienced by Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines reveals the dialectical dynamics of dominant group ideologies. And, on a global scale, when

dominant ideologies are accepted by the subordinated Indigenous peoples who remain exploited in colonised societies.

In *Europe and the People without History* (1982), Eric Wolf expands on how globalisation becomes the making of states for new boundaries and resources and argued that capitalist change involves a situation where a “Society in need of order becomes a particular society to be ordered”. Torres Strait is one particular society as ordered by colonial influence that I adopt Wolf’s theory to describe the Islanders’ history: “Economics abandoned its concern with how socially organised populations produce to supply politics and [the process] became instead, a study [or motive] of how to create markets” (1982, p. 9). Wolf’s approach is a general one and he does not provide detailed ethnographic assessment on the impact of technology and economy on particular societies. His approach uses a neo-Marxist approach to structural relationships, identifying how the spread of capitalism has reordered Indigenous social life:

Whereas, “traditional society” had fitted people narrowly into inherited positions, and then bound them together tightly in particularistic positions, “modern society” would sever people from inherited ties and allocate the newly mobile population to specialised and differentiated roles responding to the changing needs of an overarching universal society. Such an emerging society would also require a mechanism for setting social goals and a machinery for setting them (Wolf 1982, p. 12).

Wolf concludes that: “Those [who were] capable of generating such new arrangements would find themselves launched into modernity [and] Those incapable of doing so would find their society arrested at the point of transition or mired in traditionalism” (1982, p. 12). In Torres Strait, the mechanism and machinery for setting the Islanders’ social goals included them becoming a part of a modern bureaucratic state, with an administrative structural control over both the resources and Islander society, making transparent that Islander culture change was inevitable. Extending on this, Wolf’s assessment of global social change considered the transitional process of dividing the globe into modern and traditional sectors served at the same time to block the effective comprehension of the relationship between the dominant and subordinate cultures (in this case, governments’ interventions and Torres Strait Islanders). There has certainly been an impasse for Torres Strait Islanders where the supply of knowledge held by the dominant group was never equally shared. Purposely it served the Islanders to fit neatly into Wolf’s description:

“Each society was defined as an autonomous and bounded structure of social relations, thus discouraging analysis of intersocietal or intergroup interchanges, including internal strife, colonialism, imperialism, and societal dependency” (1982, p. 13).

For Wolf (1982, p. 13), the various methods of incorporation provide strategies for rapid transitional change to restructure indigenous societies to capitalism. In these situations “inter-societal or intergroup interchange” are not important but become subverted to an unequal social relationship between the privileged and underprivileged, which is determined by the growth of worldwide specialisation. For Torres Strait Islanders, the imposition of capitalism, and its associated administrative structures on their culture area, divided their social world by introducing a new division of labour. New descriptive categories like: ‘Island magistrate’, ‘Island constabulary’, ‘Church wardens’, and more generally, marine workers and domestic labour came about not through a process of Indigenous change but by the direct influence of an external authority. I have used Wolf’s broad assessment of societies to show that “contemporary change in traditional societies, [is] about the penetration of capitalism, the growth of a worldwide specialisation and division of labour, and the development of domination by some populations over others” (Wolf 1982, p. 15). Wolf’s assessment of the situation nicely sums up the global impact of capitalism and the exchange relationships both within and between societies as a consequence of Western expansion.

Interpreting the exchange relationships within and between societies, one example drawn from Narotzky (1997, p. 10 – 11), indicates that “Productivity is a complex and ambiguous concept which appears strongly to relate the idea of ‘economic development’; that is, the expression of a more efficient way of gaining access to material goods” (Narotzky 1997, p. 10 – 13). The colonial systems that replaced traditional values with modern materials quickly became a relationship of dependency for Torres Strait Islanders. Islanders’ dependency has now been incorporated into the expanding market of industrialisation and imperialism of the West, seen as an expansion for space and resources. The growth of political representation at the local level in Torres Strait was directed by external forces. The process has efficiently diverted Islanders’ attention toward a monetary-based

materialistic market. Islanders are transformed into labour.

A study by Etzioni and Etzioni-Haley, (1973, p. 336) on “selective culture change” maintains that social change in societies involves a response and interpretation of the specific historical setting of dominant cultural impositions. I interpret “selective culture change” for Torres Strait Islanders as predominantly a one way process imposed from outside which often ignored diversity in Islander society and the ways local tradition was dynamic and holistic.

Ivan Illich has been a strident critic of “institutionalisation” and many of the “development ideologies” for many years. His book, *Celebration of Awareness: A Call for Institutional Revolution*, (1969) raised critical questions about the role of the church and welfare agencies that claimed to be acting in the name of progress and development in third world countries. His *Tools for Conviviality* (1973) offers a critique of how modern technologies can act against the interests of people in developed economies as much as those of colonised and developing ones. A recent retrospective review of Illich’s controversial ideas by Hoinacki and Mitcham (2002) has examined the machinery of capitalist economic progress and the loss of what Illich calls vernacular values.

One of the themes I explore in this study is the importance of traditional values in Torres Strait Islander Society who had their own nature of religion, customary laws, family and kinship units and traditional economy that are recorded in their myths and legends and from Islanders’ testimonies of past experiences. This is not a call to return to some mythical golden age of the traditionalist, but a call to remember what is valuable in the past in making sense of the present. Illich’s celebration of traditional or vernacular values of hospitality and conviviality are important as Islanders work at constructing their own future. The examples of Illich and others have assisted me in my approach to understand that the transition of Torres Strait Islanders by capitalist intervention has seen the inclusion of the general processes of development in ways that produce deprivation both economically and socially through institutionalisation.

On the Australian mainland, I find Trigger’s (1992) historical and ethnographical accounts as a useful case to study internal control and institutionalisation. Trigger

studied the Australian Aborigines of Doomadgee Mission in the Gulf of Carpentaria in Queensland who came under the imposition of the colonial force of assimilation of total outsider control. The force of control was derived from the Christian institutions of management “as the mission community became firmly institutionalised from 1940s onwards, the mission became inextricably entwined with secular administration and firm control of an increasing population” (Trigger, 1992, p. 76). Moreover, he notes that “the process of authoritarian control by mission staff [became] a key feature of Doomadgee life” (1992, p. 76). The management of the Doomadgee people contained restrictions on mobility, restricting the people within the confines of the mission and making the indigenous residents into a workforce “Aboriginal men could be loaned for employment by one protector to another or ‘withdrawn’ from employment when considered necessary” (1992, p. 76). Trigger writes that the missionisation of the Aboriginal people under institutional control caused friction between the mission administrators and the pastoralists who heavily relied on Aboriginal labour for economic reasons. Aboriginal labour was cheap as underpaid or unpaid stockman or as domestic servants on outlying cattle stations and according to Trigger:

For a time, missionaries appear to have been competing with local bureaucrats as agents of the state administrative apparatus, for control over the Aboriginal population. The basis of the pastoralists’ power lay in their *de facto* control of the settings in which Aboriginal people found their employment (1992, p. 76).

The transition from the era of colonial management to administration by an Aboriginal elected council system accomplished little change. The council members were responsible to governments under a system of self-determination through indirect means and his account of the memories of Aborigines at Doomadgee uncovered the inhuman treatment of the local population by European administrators, in particular the missionaries. It involved the over-management of displaced tribal groups into missions through policies controlled by the State. It undermined Aboriginal lifestyles through colonial ideologies of tutelage together with the religious reconstruction of Indigenous culture and practises. Trigger mentions that the institutionalisation of the Doomadgee people had an effect of: “moral suasion” recommended by the state bureaucrats [that] has worked [well] to consolidate hegemonic domination of Aboriginal consciousness” (1992, p. 76).

In Australia, colonialism on the mainland can be understood as expressed through Aboriginal memories recorded by Trigger in his recording of Doomadgee history. He described the Western approach as “the historical development of Aboriginal/White relations during the first forty or so years of colonial impact” and the thoughts of the Doomadgee Aboriginal Elders by saying: “however, accounts (from older people particularly) indicate that it is the disruption of social and spiritual order [of the Aborigines] which occurred during colonisation that marks the end of *Wanggala Time*” (1992, p. 17). Seen from my point of view, this is the era that marks the beginning of the disintegration of Indigenous culture and tradition. From an Islander perspective, when I compare my people’s history with Trigger’s evaluation of the Aboriginal situation in Doomadgee a similar pattern emerges, complemented in the literature and oral tradition of the colonial situation of Torres Strait. Trigger’s evidence depicts a history of cultural adaptation and adoption that produced containment and control through various methods under colonial institutional practices.

On a broader scale, Trigger includes a brief account of Torres Strait Islanders in his case study as an example of ‘moral suasion’ together with the Islanders’ colonial experience of cultural disintegration. The Doomadgee history and the Islanders’ experience of colonisation are similar, whose Ailan Kustom was well influenced to adopt European values:

Yet the Islanders’ custom result from a colonial history stretching back, in the case of some islands, to the 1840s. This is a case of successful indoctrination by missionaries and government teachers who inculcated the ideals of spiritual and material progress to the extent that Islanders came to celebrate the anniversary of the coming of the light (the Gospel) that ended the darkness (the pre-Christian situation of the Islanders). They regarded themselves forever indebted to White people for this ‘gift beyond price’ [and] From the 1930s, local courts made up of Islanders upheld a code of by-laws derived mainly from the teachings of missionaries, which included such offences as fornication, adultery, message carrying and domestic squabbling. (Trigger 1992, p. 13)

Trigger’s explanation of the Aboriginal and Islander state of affairs in Queensland reflects policies of assimilation where control and protection has been the dominant influence in the “re-socialisation” of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Thus, by this view, we should be careful in a study of colonial social relations not to over-emphasise the constraints on Aboriginal [and Torres Strait Islander] thinking that derive from key ideas imposed by the

colonisers [or] at least we should not stress this aspect of colonialism without addressing sufficiently the role of economic power. (Trigger 1992, p. 10)

Torres Strait Islanders and Outsiders

Professor Nakata is a Torres Strait Islander academic who in 1997 produced his PhD thesis in critique of the Western system of education and colonialism in Torres Strait. Nakata explores and evaluates the impact of contemporary intrusions into the lifestyles of Torres Strait Islanders both into the present and past as history. From an educational point of view, his thesis “The cultural interface: An exploration of the intersection of Western knowledge systems and Torres Strait Islanders positions and experiences, 1997” explores the intersection of the Western system of inscribing Torres Strait Islanders in ways to produce knowledge through literature over the last century and to understand the:

Western order of things and to learn about whether historical relations between us, [Torres Strait Islanders] as formed discursively in the literature between Islanders and non-Islanders, constrain educational possibilities for Islanders. (Nakata, 1997, p. ii)

At the beginning of his thesis, Nakata notes the political position and experiences of his family, his time at the university and his community in Torres Strait. He mentions that the positioning and experience of Torres Strait Islanders in educational literature is done not to point out the omissions, but to “explain the non-representation of the political aspects of Islander lifeworlds at the intersection of non-Islander and Islander trajectories” (Nakata, 1997, p. 1). In reference to the Islander standard of education in Queensland, Nakata argues the Islander world was at the periphery with non-Islander institutions, their external knowledge and economy. Education was a force that grounded the Islander world to the many influences that reorganised the Islander ways of doing things. Accordingly, Nakata states the Islander communities in Torres Strait are strong, proud and diverse and united through a shared history in particular, when religious order and recurring government administration has forged or restructured the Islander lifestyle. The intrusion reshaped traditional Torres Strait from discrete but interconnected Island communities into a political unity through Islander participation in a new social order, even gaining some independence within it. In pursuit of their contemporary goals, Nakata states that the Islander dual lifestyle contained oppressive restraints

and restrictions through which Torres Strait Islanders developed their Ailan Kustom to reflect the multicultural aspects of Torres Strait Islander history.

According to Nakata, the coercion and management of Torres Strait Islanders under the colonial system of administration in the 1860s and into the 1930s motivated the initiative for Islander politics as instituted by their administrators. It produced leadership within the Islander communities and currently it continues to represent Islanders in the Torres Strait within the wider Australian communities “this was itself an imposed and compromising position for Islanders” and:

It has been a political position of comparative weakness, where little more than formal and dignified posturing came to substitute for coherently articulating our position and negotiating our future. The Islander leader has achieved so much for the Torres Strait community is an enormous credit to their perseverance and patience, their pride and dignity, their skills and intelligence, their faith and vision, and their deep love for the homeland and way of life. For they have done so much without the benefit of a full and comparable education, and without the skills or knowledge of the outside world. (Nakata, 1997, p. 11 – 12)

Trigger’s (1992, p. 10) assessment of the Aboriginal situation in Doomadgee suggests:

The importance of dominant ideology can be recognised without implying that there can be no resilient subordinate culture, or that the intellectual universe of subordinate groups becomes identical to that of the ruling group.

Trigger argues that “another level of ideology is directly relevant to practice, directly influenced by experience and unreflectively uttered as common sense” (Ibid). Nakata maintain that the Islanders’ trajectory did not diminish, it continued in the way that Islanders had dealt with interventions; by developing their identity and sensing themselves as something new but adaptive to the changing world around them. In his critique of Western knowledge systems Nakata argues the interface position of Torres Strait Islanders is a product of colonial interventions introduced by outsiders that has produced complexities in cultural difference between Islanders and non-Islanders.

As a fellow Torres Strait Islander, I agree with Nakata’s analysis of the complexities of cultural difference relate to the “historical relations of power between non-Islanders and Islanders” according to Nakata, who described that relationship as embedded in the Western knowledge system, that it “overlooked or simplified in

many non-Islander analyses”. (1997, p. 29) The hypothesis led Nakata to search for answers by thoroughly exploring and analysing the available literature and ethnographies of early explorers and missionaries, and historical reports leading to the intervention of colonial Queensland quests for new resources throughout Torres Strait. Nakata was highly critical of a number of authors; he focused his attention on the memoirs of the Rev McFarlane of the LMS (London Missionary Society) *Among the Cannibals* (1888), who wrote of his perceptions of Torres Strait Islanders and, secondly, on the works of anthropologist, Haddon who led the Cambridge expedition team of academics to Torres Strait. Haddon’s second visit was to record the tradition and culture of the Islanders. Earlier, in 1888, as a marine zoologist he studied and collected the marine data of the region. I discuss Haddon and his works in this chapter.

In his assessment of MacFarlane’s ethnography, Nakata analyses the discourse of the missionary’s rationalisation of the LMS missions in Torres Strait:

Text provides an exemplar [or paradigm] of the beginning of Macfarlane’s systematic way of thinking about and for understanding the – who the Islander is and what sort of intervention the Islander requires in the light of this. (Nakata, 1997, p. 66)

Nakata shows that MacFarlane observed Torres Strait Islanders as cannibals, as noble savages and lost souls that required the missionary intervention a good and worthy project that “rationalised his [MacFarlane] mission’s goals and which thus pre-ordered Islander lives and their relationship with Europeans” (Ibid). This relationship, according to Nakata, includes the mercantile and colonial interests for expansion in the economy, commercial trade interests, extension of state and competing system of labour management and the European interests for power.

In concluding his analysis of Macfarlane’s ethnography, Nakata explains:

This study seeks only to understand the ways Islanders have been inscribed into histories in order to gain a better understanding of the episternological relations between ‘them and us’ that, in effect, constraint the possibilities for intervening in Islander education today. (1997, p. 38)

In his critique of the Haddon expedition to Torres Strait, the six volumes of

ethnographical materials *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Strait* published in sequence - 1901, 1904, 1907, 1908, 1912, and 1935, Nakata suggests that the texts represent a different perspective:

It stands as one of the most comprehensive attempts to document the lives and characteristics of a society of people before the onslaught of colonial expansion changed them [Torres Strait Islanders] forever and before their previous skills and knowledge were lost to the world. (1997, p. 68)

Nakata said it was cutting edge technology containing new scientific disciplines and knowledges in social science that challenged the boundaries of what was already recorded or understood about ‘primitive’ people and that any discrepancy in its contents “would be understood in the historical context of the expedition” (Ibid).

In this chapter, my argument is along similar lines regarding the outsiders’ perceptions of Torres Strait Islanders. My field interviews, with a number of Torres Strait elders and other Islanders, regarding the works of Haddon indicated a more positive response towards this recorded history.

In the coming chapter, I use Haddon as a source to help convey the traditional aspects from a Torres Strait Islander point of view. Nakata, in his final summing up of the Haddon’s six volume reports concludes by saying:

Such practises of the Western knowledge systems, as demonstrated here with the Cambridge Reports, have sanctioned a particular discursive relation between non-Islanders as explorers and founders of ‘truths’, and Islanders as ‘subject’ to report on as well as an ‘object’ to later profess about. Because of the failure to consider these two aspects of the text produced by the Cambridge scholars as well as the readiness to accept the primacy of Western schemes without question, relations between Islanders and non-Islanders continue to be institutionalised in ways that are now taken for granted. (1997, p. 239)

In this section, I examine outsiders’ perceptions of Torres Strait Islanders and their culture and argue that Torres Strait Islanders had a religion recorded in their traditional history. Recorded¹⁰ from an anthropological perspective my analysis must begin by acknowledging my people’s history. I nterpreting it from my point of view, it has been my intention to examine and analyse literature to comprehend the history and culture of Torres Strait Islanders written by outsiders and interpret it from an

¹⁰ I defined Torres Strait Islander traditional history as depicted in their myths and legends as the origins of Islander traditional culture evolving around the Islander physical environment and lifestyle.

Islander perspective.

Lawrie in 1983 wrote an ethnographical article in the monthly newsletter *Torres Strait Islander Issue 3/83* of the former Queensland Department of Aboriginal Islander Advancement titled, *The Early L.M.S. Missionaries in Torres Strait*. Her article was compiled from LMS records or missionary's contact notes with the people of Erub (Darnley Is) in 1871. I return to Lawrie in the in the coming chapter. Her article gave a detailed description of the missionaries account when they sailed from Erub to meet with the people of Dauan (Mt Cornwallis Is): "At the hour of evening we had all the natives together that they might witness an act of worship the true God, the first act of the kind no doubt that had ever been performed on their dark shore" (Cited in Lawrie, 1983, p. 10). This missionary's perception of Torres Strait Islanders was a common experience of early explorers and adventurers. It is also found reported in Pritchard (1961, p. 1):

Early European travellers among savage peoples generally related that they had little or no religion ... If the early traveller found among a people nothing corresponding to what he himself had been brought up to regard as religion he was prone to report that they had no religion.

In contrast to Nakata's views on the Cambridge Reports, I have a different course for understanding the traditional aspects of Torres Strait and its people. These reports were compiled from his second journey, after he had first travelled to Torres Strait in 1888-9. His interaction with Islanders during his initial stage of research led him to become more interested in the ethnography of the people who, at that time, were experiencing significant changes due to the influence of foreign economic interests. In 1898, Haddon made a second expedition with others to Torres Strait to record the Islanders' physical nature and to photograph them, collect objects of significance, record oral histories and gather other cultural information. In compiling his memoirs, Haddon's reports covered the years of 1898 and 1899 and he wrote of his concern:

There is a gap in our knowledge of what was taking place in Torres Straits during the twenty – two years between 1849 and 1871, and there is only desultory information about what has occurred since. During the first blank period many vessels passed through the Straits, some of which doubtless touched at various islands, but what the foreigner did there is unrecorded (Haddon 1935, p. xiii).

Haddon's ethnographical information has been one of the main sources of literature

used in the study of Torres Strait that scholars (cited in Lawrence 1991, p. 2) have examined. Moore (1984), examined Haddon in his book *The Torres Strait Collection of A.C. Haddon: a descriptive catalogue* (1984) and reported: “It is probable that the 1898 collections from the Eastern Torres Strait are among the most complete and fully documented of any made among native people in any part of the world”. Moore’s ethnography, *Arts and Craft of Torres Strait* (1989) noted that “*The Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres*

Strait published under Haddon’s editorship by the Cambridge University Press in six large volumes between 1902 and 1935 have become a classic” (1989, p. 10)¹¹.

It is an informative classic, which recorded much traditional data. It was composed mainly from the primary accounts of the old times, as told by informants of the remnant Islander tradition existing in 1888 – 9. Haddon (1935) amassed a considerable amount of information: “Feeling that our [Western] knowledge of the Torres Strait was extremely incomplete” he reported that:

In 1880, the welfare of the natives became the concern of the Queensland Government abuses were stopped and in time benevolent administration made the lives and property of the Islanders secure and they were helped to bear the straits’ consequent upon the rapid introduction of an alien and complex civilisation” (Haddon 1935, pp. xiii – xiv).

From my perspective, as an Islander, this period denotes the establishment of the cultural reconstruction of Islander lifestyle. Haddon’s reports take into account the Islanders’ versions of the making of traditional culture that had evolved from the myths and legends of Torres Strait Islands. Haddon’s recorded history of the Torres Strait is an important source of knowledge for present day Torres Strait Islanders who continue to search his reports for primary data on traditional practises. In this study, I have used Haddon’s reports of how he interpreted rituals and ceremonies from the different groups of Islands and have examined his analysis as to why my people’s culture:

Had become so modified by their contact with Europeans and other foreigners [that] very little of their original lore remains. [This] comprises the period of the beginning of the pearl-shelling and beche-de-mer

¹¹ According to Moore (1989, p. 9): Haddon “became fascinated by their [Islanders] tales of the old days before the white men came and began to record and collect artefacts; it was this experience that subsequent decided him to change his specialty to anthropology”.

industries, about which more or less lurid rumours were current when I [Haddon] first visited the locality. If anything can be retrieved about the contact of the white man and their South Sea crews with the native it would make most interesting and doubtless unsavoury reading (Haddon 1935, pp. xiii - xiv).

Haddon's team encountered significant changes from the traditional period, and found most of his informants were missionary taught. His quotation of the Rev. S. Macfarlane's report in 1880 made this point:

To meet the peculiar wants of this mission; viz. to assemble promising young men and boys from different points of the mission, speaking different languages, at a central station; and there, removed from their evil surroundings and family influences teach them the *English language* and an *industrial school* prominent features in the course of their instruction (Haddon 1935, p. xiii - xiv).

Haddon's examination of the colonial situation was based on selected Islanders' accounts, in particular, the Mamoose, who were privileged to account on behalf of the people representing a system of collusion between government officials and selected Islander(s). Haddon's effort to record a primary Islander tradition remains very much appreciated by most Torres Strait Islanders who have accessed his reports as a reference point for cultural data and genealogy. He wrote from an outsider's point of view and considered the changes in Torres Strait Islanders and their ways of life. As a research scientist, Haddon did not provide a detailed report on the internal dynamics of capitalism and development even though his investigation had noted the impact of institutional change to Islander custom and tradition in Torres Strait.¹² Considering the critiques of his work by contemporary, Haddon's approach and his views on internal development and cultural loss in Torres Strait were methodical and relevant to my examination of the situation of Torres Strait Islanders today. I use this evidence with other sources in part to assess the relevance of Beckett's (1987) interpretation of present Torres Strait society, its history, and the effect of colonialism on both the Islanders' development and cultural adaptation.

Beckett (1987) worked amongst Torres Strait Islanders and examined how local

¹² Lawrence assessments of Haddon's 6 Volume Report of his expedition to Torres Strait in the 1800s gave a critical analysis "The reports, the result of an expedition to the Torres Strait in 1898, were prepared by Haddon and his associates over a period of 37 years using their own field work materials and information provided by missionaries, teachers and traders [and] The result is comprehensive, but structurally disorganised" (Lawrence 1991, p. 5).

environmental changes have impacted on the Islander's lifestyle as they survived on the fringes of modern society. Based on his fieldwork and the considerable time he spent researching Torres Strait Islanders and internal changes, he was accepted by the Meriam people (Murray Islanders) into their kinship system. Beckett wrote the *Torres Strait Islanders: Customs and Colonialism* (1987) to record the Islanders' experience of colonisation. Beckett highlights the partial autonomy the Islanders experienced in contrast to Queensland's colonial policies on Aboriginal affairs and presented an account of the interviews he held with the local people and compiled the Islanders' voices into his ethnography as 'Island Custom' describing how "island custom stands in a contrapuntal relationship to 'white man custom,' something that is appropriate for Islanders and inappropriate for Europeans, as for example [traditional] dancing" (1989, p. 4). Beckett's research has enabled me to distinguish significant differences in the colonial management of Torres Strait Islanders and the management of mainland Aborigines.

Beckett (1987) undertook his field studies in the 1950s when Torres Strait Islanders remained under administrative control of the Protector for Aborigines. Beckett's research became a case study of Torres Strait Islanders who in time would have to come to terms with their primary role as labour. Beckett's work has been a valuable contribution and has given me a broader outlook on the global situation as faced by other Indigenous societies and it assisted me with other source materials in compiling my arguments.

Sharp (1993), researched the Islands in later years and produced the *Stars of Tagai: Torres Strait Islander* based on the traditional and contemporary lifestyle of Torres Strait Islanders. Her fourteen years of ethnographic research in Torres Strait enabled her to explore the remnants of traditional Torres Strait culture overlain by the contemporary history of change. It is an account composed of the cross-examination of historical sources and the memories of Torres Strait Islanders. It is an interpretative history, with particular reference to the mythical beliefs of Islanders and foremost on the Meriams (Murray Islanders), with a focus based on their claim for native title in the historic *Eddie Mabo Case*. She has interpreted the growing self-awareness of Torres Strait Islanders in terms of how Islanders both recall their past and interpret their present. Sharp's study explains how certain Torres Strait

Islanders (past Island leaders) have confronted the continued incursion of government's policies, particularly in her discussion of "The forces for change [that addressed] some of complexities of these processes within a social context in which cultural difference became a condition of imperial power dominance" (Sharp 1993, p. 95) that continue to exist in the present administration of the Islands. She describes how Islander control under social welfare was accompanied by the outsider's exploitation of the economic potential of Torres Strait, using Islanders as the primary source of labour under a controlled working relationship in the marine industry.

Overall, her ethnography has used economic geography to examine the traditional and historical accounts of Islanders as precedents of a forceful political economy verses tradition. She distinguished between the role of local conditions and the socio-economic role of outsiders that characterised the colonial history of Torres Strait. Of particular significance is the uniqueness of local Island history under dominant external control and the influences that forced Islander lifestyle towards becoming a society of imported traits. Her study reflects the key historical dynamics of moulding and reshaping Islander economic and cultural dispossession by an ongoing process of producing 'representative roles' which mirror the past of colonial Queensland in Islanders' administration.

Barnett (1959, p. 1) focused his study on how it relates to the "formulation and implementation of administrative programs for dependent population". Barnett drew attention to knowledge and policy in his examination of native administration and colonial policies. In his assessment, Barnett noted that government representatives have seldom questioned the values of cultural and ethnographical data for administrative purposes. He notes that modern nations with a colonial program would be dedicated to the destruction of Indigenous populations and their knowledge of local customs and traditions. Barnett mentioned that custodial governments would be charged with the responsibility of taking due consideration to Indigenous laws and customs to initiate the intent of their charters using native advisors. According to Barnett the employment of native advisors requires a different approach to become the official informants to governments:

They become, in short, advisors on native traditions, needs, and opinions. They may have status of friend, aide, referee, consultant, or counsellor; they may be self-appointed or selected through some officially constituted process [and] in any event, their knowledge of native affairs and their interpretations

of them establish reference points for the definition and execution of policy” (Barnett 1956, p. 3).

His study has helped focus my examination of the colonial situation in Torres Strait with examples on the concept of political representivity within a system of indirect rule for eliciting information.

Interpreting Oral Tradition and Politics of Torres Strait

According to Torres Strait Islanders, their cultural knowledge and practices came from their ancestors and have been practiced and passed down throughout the generations of Islanders’ occupation. The oral history of Torres Strait describes the Islander culture as independently sufficient in their local environment. In an interview with a senior Islander Elder, he recalls his experience of two worlds of existence: living on the mainland as mainstream Australian and maintaining the identity of being a Torres Strait Islander. He spoke in Torres Strait Creole (a mix of Islander language and English).¹³

Yes, well that knowledge that passed down to us to our level of generation...we grew up in a strong cultural way of doing things...for instance, if we go out to the garden in...yes! We make a bird call and there was no way you shout, there’s no way you talk aloud, you only talk just ordinarily like we talking here ...you can’t shout ...big law and it used to guide ...[we were] govern by these laws and these laws were from the traditions, from the time of our ancestors from the past and we really educated ...they directing us not to steal and we can’t steal and they directing us ...you can’t walk over other man’s yard and we could not do that and they telling us you cannot cut trees like in a sow [forest], if there was a tree across road you cannot cut it, you either jump over it or go under it, until then things stay there until they rot and uphold that law traditionally, and really directing us ... that sense of direction they give it to us...(S W 2000, pers. comm., May)¹⁴

The account reflects the past of Mer Islanders (Murray Is) where customary law evolved over time, was regulated through a religious group of the Malo-Bomai (Beckett, 1987, p.117) a spiritual tradition that governed the Mer Islanders’ day to day activities, rites of passage, reciprocal and provisional access to local resources,

¹³ I have transcribed accordingly the personal interview of each Islander informants as recorded in their use of Torres Strait Creole and I have not discriminated to reorder their words in ways palatable to the outsiders’ way of conversion.

¹⁴ The interpretation given here is an example of the teaching of how customary law is taught to Islander children (in particular of Mer Is) to be aware of their surroundings (local environment), and to respect traditional custom according to the Law of Malo; “Malo Tag Mauki Mauki; Teter Mauki Mauki” (Your hands must not touch another’s property; Your feet must not go across other people’s land; and whatever is in your pathway you must leave it to rot above the ground).

and traditional land inheritance. The traditional act contained rules known by the Mer Islanders as the “Law of Malo” who believed:

Their teachings which came from Malo gave [them] something to go on: ‘If you go through the law of Malo-Bomai you will know how to go about in this life’; the seeds of that special knowledge which comes from Malo where to reap a harvest in the ever-enriching process of reciprocal giving and receiving” (Sharp, 1993, p. 91).

The customary Law of Malo in the past has been central in the stability of Meriam lifestyle. Today, it is of persistence use by Mer Islanders to demonstrate their continual occupation of their Islands (Mer, Dauar and Waier) against outsiders:

For thousand of years we have owned land and the Law of Malo who was the Meriam centre of it, made sure that members of the society were given land, they were our laws. We have Malo ra Gelar, it says that Malo keeps to his own place; Malo does not trespass in another man’s land. What belongs to others belongs to them [and] there are boundaries which were made (Sharp 1993 pp. 67-68).

This quote demonstrates customary law and traditional ownership has enabled Torres Strait Islanders to maintain their cultural connections and continual occupation of their Islands and to practise culture according to customary rights and obligations of their forbearers. However my interviews show that some Island leaders possess a habit of accepting dominant Western ideologies’ precedence over local culture and tradition. One participant I spoke to recalled his experience of cultural disintegration with memories reflecting a past where colonial policies and practises had continued on to affect the present Islander population as a whole. Other participants gave versions of the pearling industry and emphasised that Torres Strait Islanders were quite capable of running their own affairs without government interventions. My examination of the insiders’ perspective gives a broader representation of the restrictive measures of governments, whose systems of control have undermined the traditional political and social system of Torres Strait.

Reassessing the colonial methods of control has led me to suggest that the outsiders’ system of administration removed the possibility of self-development in Torres Strait as it systematically deprived Torres Strait Islanders of their rights under common law. The system continues in its present form as one elder from Torres Strait recites his interpretation:

We have been conditioned by those very things in colonial rule, that we tried to get rid of in the first place, but we carry them through [passive resistance] and I think today, those things are, some of that type of you

knows, conditioning are still ar er ar that kind of thinking ar er today. (J W 2000, pers. comm., July)

My interview continues:

G.P. Colonial Politics, how do you see colonial politics affect these Islands? You know because in the past it was administered by in the colonial eras which is been you know we've come under the administration say from Somerset all the way through and come through the Protector for Native Affairs and Department of Native Affairs which you know all this been coming through. Ar where do you think Torres Strait is heading today, you think we are still in that same whats er name or are we going ahead?

J.W. Ar since those, since the time of under the Act or even before that, up until now the ar or should I say the intervention of ar the government ar annexing Torres Strait ar ar as part of Queensland, the ar, what has happened was that the ar --- that was then that they introduced a welfare mentality. There was a lot of attempt from Indigenous skippers of people working in the pearling industry and trochus industry at that time and they showed a lot of skills that they were capable of handling ar their own affairs, and after all that we are seafaring people ar so the sea was not an unknown place for Torres Strait Islanders, one of those things that I would like to make a point since that time up until now that the government of the day ar ensured I feel ensured, that ar the they made changes all right, but what they did that they changed the name of the department, but the policy did not really leave us.

G.P. Are those policies still being as you, like you say ar can you still see those policy still being implemented towards our people in the Straits, is it still being used?

Participant. Yes!

G.P. All though there have been changes to the number of departments and even today we've got the Regional Authority (Torres Strait Regional Authority).

Participant. Yes! Ar yea I feel that ar a lot of the things that have been done on other areas that we can, that we can take credit for and regard it as achievement, but as far as policies are concerned, the policies are still embedded ar and what happened that after awhile when we are, when our people started to take a leadership role in ar different organisations and start to become decision makers themselves the very thing that we have not realised yet is that over time we ar some of us got conditioned by the very thing that we were or the very organisation or the very people we were dead set against like in the first place, so because we were conditioned ar to think that way and you find it across the world ar that ar that immediately you start apply that for -

G.P. Your own people?

J.W. Like your own people.

G.P. I see.

J.W. And you just have to look across in at Indigenous countries and in like in other organisation at the very thing that we've ar that we are not really realise that we have been conditioned that some of us we have been conditioned by those very things in colonial rule that we tried to get rid of in the first place but we carry them through and I think today those things are some of that type of you know conditioning are still ar here ar that kind of thinking are here today. (J W 2000, pers. comm., July)

The terms according to tradition, and from a contemporary perspective, illustrates the argument of Etzioni and Etzioni-Halevy (1973, p. 336) about the need to consider the universal specifics of historical setting and dominant cultural impositions. In considering the historical setting of dominant cultural impositions, my study examines the developmental history of Torres Strait by analysis of both the contemporary and oral accounts to make my point.

The Impact of Modernity on Tradition

The Islanders' adaptation to development as a labour force according to Beckett (1987, p. 9) is that the "Marine industry carried the Islanders to the threshold of the industrial world and left them there" without choices of directional change. From their traditional economy "They were drawn from their subsistence activities by the lure of consumer goods [and later] to be forced back by on these activities again". Although European mariners were exploiting the traditional labour for the harvesting of these resources, Loos (1982) has noted that, they did not dispossess the inhabitants of their traditional lands and the Islanders' acceptance of this was due to the outsiders' superiority in technology and, a modern economy politically arranged to gradually dispossess the Islanders of their lands and resources.

Haddon (1908) described this as the period of Islanders accepting Western influence and recorded that traditional land owners on the Eastern Islands had their lands leased for beche-de-mer and pearl-shell stations, and for mission purposes: "The Murray Islands are the scene of exchanges, sales, leases and loans of lands ... land is brought more or less under compulsion by Government and Mission" (1908, p. 135). This meant that Mer Islanders were well conversant with the European system of exchange by making their traditional lands available for commercial leasing or sold

them for the medium of exchange or under compulsion by the authorities of the Church and government. It was the Church that conditioned Islanders by the greater conviction of accepting Christianity from ‘heathenism’ when the Gospel was first introduced by “The first missionaries to brave the Islands were members of London Missionary Society [to] Darnley Island on 1 July, 1871” (Burchill 1972, pp. 2 - 4) who gradually spread the Christian message to the other Islands and today it is celebrated annually by Torres Strait Islanders to commemorate it as a Christian festival “*The Coming of the Light to Torres Strait on July 1, 1871*”.

The LMS ethnocentric indoctrination of interpreting the arrival of the Christian gospel to the Islands changed Torres Strait Islanders’ culture of darkness to live in the ‘light’. From observing the modern ceremony of July One, Beckett (1987: 87) wrote that it was not so much a reconstruction of Christian events, as it encompassed “an articulation of meanings, one of many to be considered in this attempt to describe Islander consciousness after three generations of colonialism”. In contrast, Genovese (1974) writes:

When it proclaimed a single nature, endowed by God, for every man, it also proclaimed all men brothers. But in so doing, despite every attempt to separate the Kingdom of God from the Kingdom of man, it illustrated the chasm that separated the equality of men before God from the grim inequality of man before man. (Cited in Beckett, 1987, p. 93)

According to Beckett (1987) the effects of religion and politics, created Torres Strait Islanders as “Part-time proletariat with all the contradictions that such an idea implies” when Islanders participated in the marine industry for self-determination and whilst under Christian instructions, affirmed the tasks of the LMS as the “Pillar of the colonial order, [whose role] is not to reduce it to a mere adjunct or instrument of the economic and political interests, but to build its foundations on the reconstructed social and cultural change of modernity” (Beckett 1987, p. 39). According to Sharp (1993, pp. 155-156), the marine industry brought changes to the “Old World” of the Islanders and the “Activities of the pearlers [Torres Strait Islanders] joined a new thread to the enlarging networks of nineteenth century capitalist expansion”. The outcome was that traditional resources, in particular pearl-shells, became a commercial commodity subject to conflicts between the capitalist entrepreneurs and the maritime laws of Queensland that eventually lead to the

annexation of the Torres Strait Islands in 1879.¹⁵ The introduced system was a threat to the local population:

Beche-de-mer fishing began in the 1840s and pearl shelling had begun in earnest by the 1860s, [and the] shelling industry based in the Strait rose to world peak by the end of the century [and] For the people of the area, the establishment of that industry meant violence and violation. In the Torres Strait Islands most distant from Cape York the destruction of the inhabitants came to a halt following the arrival of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the annexation by Queensland. (Sharp, 1993, p. 156)

Inevitably, the establishment of colonial rule in the long term placed Torres Strait Islanders within the realms of global development; where “Traditional structures can supply skills, and traditional values can supply sources of legitimation which are capable of being utilised in pursuit of new goals and, with new processes” (Etzioni & Etzioni-Halevy 1973, p. 336). This was not the case for Torres Strait Islanders; they were the means of production to supply a volatile market economy. It would fit the global description of social change made by Wolf (1982, p. 287) who describe how human aggregates interconnect in time and space to respond to the “Forces generated by the various modes of production, impels us to think in more processual ways about the notion of society” and his model has directed me to bring together my sources in processual ways to complement his account:

“Societies” emerge as changing alignment of social groups segments, and classes, without either fixed boundaries or stable internal institutions. Each mode, in the compass of its influence, generates conjunction of groups and classes that serve its requirement under given historical and geographical circumstances. (Wolf 1982, p. 387)

Wolf’s notion of “cultural change or cultural evolution” does not operate alone but is part of an “interconnected system” connecting economics with the “mode of production, [where] capitalism interacted with other modes to achieve its present dominance” (Wolf 1982, p. 387). Wolf places the Torres Strait Islanders within the perspective of global development in the process of how Wolf (1982, p. 76) explains his theory:

¹⁵ According to Beckett (1987) the LMS “Did however inaugurate a new moral order, imposed upon the *Realpolitik* of the preceding period [and] took responsibility of law and order, since the Islands had not yet been annexed. In the later years Queensland would institute its own rule, driving out not only the trepangers but missionaries, it [Queensland] would build on the foundation laid by the LMS” (Beckett 1987, p. 24).

One of the utilities of the concept of the mode of production lies precisely in that it allows us to visualise intersystemic as well as intrasystemic relationships ... to reveal the changing ways in which one mode, capitalism, interacted with other modes to achieve its present dominance.

Wolf's description of a universal culture of collaborators and contenders compliments Firth's (1956, p. 1) broader examination on education as one form of social change:

Every study is sensitive to changing social conditions and the changing climate of social thought in general. As knowledge advances and techniques improves, the framework of personal ideas in which each students of the subject tries to concentrate and express what he learns, alters shape.

Placing together both perspectives from an insiders' point of view, accommodates Sharps' description of "the comparative experience of a new knowledge system" (1993, pp 8-9) they becomes the internal representative politics of the Torres Strait.

Oral Interpretations of Contemporary Island History

Oral history is not a Torres Strait Islander concept. It is communication about knowledge of the past and "Among the various kinds of historical sources, tradition occupies a special place" in our society, (Vansina, 1965, p. x). On establishing oral history as evidence, (Thompson 1988, pp. 240-241) has argued that "Oral evidence which can be directly confirmed has been subjected [by scrutiny] of merely illustrative value" [but] "unconfirmed evidence points the way towards a new interpretation that comes from direct personal experience and knowledge". My Torres Strait Islander participants seem less influenced by the contemporary history of Torres Strait. They talk freely about their experiences of how they retained traditional values in their struggle for recognition and self-sufficiency. I interviewed one of my informants about how he sees the history of Torres Strait being interpreted and written by outsiders. My questions were to understand why particular changes occurred to particular places, and why each particular place in Torres Strait supports a history of its own:

S.W. Well I must say, I read a few histories from anthropologists and I would suggest that I would say that e no quite relatively they addressing our origin or whatever. From my experience I like to see people get down to the very grass root of way of addressing [by] bringing to understanding in a that we can really grasp and understand...

G.P. So when you talk that grass root, you mean Torres Strait Islanders or Kole

[white man] can do that. Who will you understand more better?

S.W. No, I say that [white man] when they interview or anthropologists interview a few people, just a few people but they don't, they don't [get] ideas from all the community, and sometime I find, I find that in the report there is a question mark such as you know...

G.P. What kind of report you are talking about?

S.W. I'm talking about report, like addressing our family tree, addressing family trees, addressing cultural way of doing things, and its not quite acceptable to me...

G.P. Who wrote this report?

S.W. Haddon, Mr. Haddon report I'm referring to, because of some family tree I find there is a gap...

G.P. You mean that there are people being left out?

S.W. People been left out, yea [yes] and I think because of, I don't know how they approach people to ask them fella question about it, or how many people they question about, but I would, but I would feel that they would ask every family, every family of every tribe, because that they have something more to give, that just talking to just two people, or I think most of the talking where originally there. I cannot go back and say original things, but to my experience till now, to my knowledge that what has been given, even they interview people of the past which is right, which I didn't know, now I know because of reading the family tree, but I find, I also find when it comes to our, our generation we start to learn them things. There is a gap because some of those things hasn't been written where suppose to be written been left out because of anthropologists they interview one side of family, they don't interview say with that clan, eight clan and should be interview eight clan... (S W 2000, pers. comm., May).

This interview confirms Haddon's evidence from when he recorded the Mer Islanders' genealogy, "[T]he genealogical record which I was able to collect in Murray Island is far less complete because the Murray Islander having a strong objection to the friends knowing that they were acting as informants in the matter" (Haddon 1908, p. 64). In relating to this, I make the point that there a significant distortions in the historical collection of Torres Strait Islander history. As such, it has created disapproval amongst most Islanders regarding how their Island culture has been modified by selected insiders for colonial administration purposes and, as is apparent in the given testament of participants, their protesting is about cultural disintegration and loss of archival lineages. External control gave Torres Strait

Islanders little option to hold on to tradition pushing them to conform to the forces of change:

According to the old myths, their ancestors subjected the fetishes brought in from other places to a process of ‘domestication’, integrating them into the local structures without denying their exotic origins. In the same way, latter day Islanders domesticated not only the songs and dances they adopted from the South Sea people but also the diving boats, the church and government, weaving them about with customary practises and organising them along customary lines. Thus island custom became, to adapt the title of Eugene Genovese’s 1974 study of slavery, *Roll, Jordon, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (Beckett 1987, p. 6).

Beckett’s (1987, p. 109) concept of “weaving them about customary practises and organising them along customary line” notes that the colonial ideologies made the “Islanders indebted to white Australians for the benefit of civilisation, but nothing that they [Islanders] could give or do was sufficient worth to redeem this”. The evidence to support Beckett’s account is found in the voices of the participants who argued that the history of others had understood the progress of Islander society in an unimportant position, placing them socially on the fringes of modern development. Overall, the examination of materials leads me to conclude that when improvised policies were implemented they hindered local Islander progress.

The Islanders’ Interpretation

In the interviews, my fellow Islanders express their disappointments with the current administrative arrangements. To them it seems a continued pattern of a colonial style of administration with a past of collusion or partnership of selected Islanders as partial government administrators and still exhibited in the present system of relationships between Island leaders and government agencies. Thus in order for me to interpret my participants’ responses I needed a broader scope for the examination of local history. According to Thompson (1988), local history, when presented by oral transmission generates new ideas with “evidence [that] opens new possibilities, and in shaping arguments it can be effective in so many different contexts” (Thompson 1988, p. 234). In this context, the following interview brings into focus how colonial administrators and Christian missionaries, by collusion, carried out the primary task of ‘civilisation’ and how Torres Strait Islanders progressed in the past, through to their present situation.

G.P. Can you give me an example of how the colonial system was adopted

into the traditional system?

S.M. Well, colonial system when it comes into ...when it was adopted to intrude into our system behind closed doors...behind closed doors if those things were destructive, behind closed doors, people make certain agreement with Governments...

G.P. You mean Torres Strait Islanders?

S.M. I mean Torres Strait Islanders people made certain bargains with Governments, from what they could get out of Government without their people knowing, without all those things, it was a hidden thing, it was always behind the iron curtain. You know to do things, it was a hidden thing, it was always behind the iron curtain...you know to do something to, well, let's use these words that, you pat my back and I'll scratch your back or you'll scratch my back and I'll scratch yours, them type of things...them type of cruel things were done behind, some very little things were done in behind, little things were done you know in the most honest...honest way was done in the open, to share with the people, and when that is happening those people that was doing deals behind closed doors were also in the movement wanted to...to really outsmart...although those people that is trying their best to get the creative profile happening and running properly, so those deals really were where people have a deal like that, it was really...there is no other way to say it, it was really robbery...

G.P. Okay, what we are talking about right, is that about like now being adopted into our system and some of our leaders took it in and you can tell me how did it affect our...to say in the economic sense...where did it leave Torres Strait Islanders?

S.M. Well, it was a rip off...

S.M. Alright, when it comes to...the focus is on Torres Strait Islanders, now nobody can tell how to live, anything that is to do with survival of the Torres Strait Islanders. We should be the first people to prey, between us we know on those little islands how to survive, but if you fit us into the systems we had to work with people, if you want to fit us into the system...to involve ourselves, this little group of people, Torres Strait Islanders, our people with the rest of the world, then we must trust people that would lead us there, so that it could lead us in a way, not talking about leadership, leadership in the economic sense, lead us there so that we could be guided so we could understand the big system...

G.P. Okay, when Colonial administration came in, did it give us the opportunity for advancement?

S.M. Well first of all in the first instance...whatever the movement from that

side if you call that colonialism is involving another name for that... Western civilisation you know, or civilisation that white civilisation now, whatever the intention is and I'm not gonna be protected, I mean impression that I've got is probably completely out of context in a way that as if we were niggers and slaves, and only we are bad people. They are bad people, so it isn't really give us the opportunity for us to stand on our own two feet and do something for our selves you know, those things were left for the determination of the individuals or organisation. It never gave us the opportunity that, we had to do those things ourselves you know, what it done in the first instance or in the first movement you know, it took away a lot of things and never gave anything back to us, and that's not speaking just biases of what happened through the history, but it did...if I could enlarge further by saying that to really do all of that, we end up...we end up in this special State of Queensland. We had two laws...one for the whites and one for blacks, you know we were under the Act, if you talk about Indigenous movement of this State or this country, there were special laws for us...designed to get rid of us and take us away from every body else...(S M 2000, pers. comm., May).

This is an Islander experience of Torres Strait when the people of Torres Strait became the subject of imperial scrutiny by the Queensland Government. It notes that certain Torres Strait Islanders collaborated with government agencies with favouritism over certain deals for positions of representative leadership over traditional leaders as cited in Singh (1979, p. 102) “This rule is rigidly enforced by the Councillors and [Islander] police ...[who] ...inspect the houses and see that laws governing their cleanliness are observed...to the Islanders it must have seemed a bizarre, discouragingly regimented existence”. This meant that those leaders who were “*doing deals behind closed doors*” did so with dishonesty towards their own people, whilst government policies were ripping off Islander rights for self-determination. Those Islanders who believed in holding on to tradition and who, at the same time, sought to adjust to the change were hindered by ‘the agencies of change’, the government’s institutions and missions: “*we end having two separate laws...one for the whites and one for the blacks, meaning of how Torres Strait Islanders in conjunction with the Aboriginal peoples of Australia came ‘Under the Act’* ” (S M 2000, pers. comm., May).

In the long term, Island leaders who have accepted the colonial ideologies of development should know it was detrimental to traditional values: “*what it done in the first instance or in the first movement you know; it took away a lot of things and never gave us anything back*” (S M 2000, pers. comm., May). In other words, the

intrusion of colonial interventions in local affairs has meant that Torres Strait Islanders' quests for self-determination and cultural continuity could remain less active within the system of government. Moreover, whilst progressive control over the Islanders' welfare and management encompassing the concept of indirect rule using local knowledge for collective policy in community development.

In conclusion, I regard the following as a broad framework in the received history of my people. The quote below from the *Torres News* places Torres Strait Islanders within the trajectories of globalisation. Examining 'development' in social terms has enabled me to argue the actions of both religious and politics towards Torres Strait Islanders by assuming that "Culture, the Christian church and government are interwoven. Within the cultural context, what the church does influence the regional government, and what the regional government does affects the church" (Mr. G. Mye as cited in "Carpentaria Cross Roads" *Torres News*, 1-7, 2002, p. 12).¹⁶ In the same article, the end result of politics and religion spells the confusion and disorientation of Islander society and according to Bishop Tony Hall-Matthews: "So throughout this whole sorry affair, the major influence has been the movement for Torres Strait Autonomy" (ibid).

¹⁶ From a cultural perspective with respect, this quote is from Uncle George Mye who is related to me. He is a very prominent Elder/Statesman in the Torres Strait who is recognised as one of the Torres Strait elders of high esteem by his people, for his ongoing involvement in Torres Strait Islander affairs and governments; he is also an active agent of change.

Chapter Three

The Social and Political Change of an Island Society

This chapter provides an analysis of contemporary political organisations in Torres Strait to give understanding and meaning to the term ‘representation’ as political advocacy. It examines how representation through local government continues to reflect the past, when the Islands first came under colonial administration in the 1800s. It conveys some understanding as to how Islander leaders have continued to adopt the methods of indirect control to representatives’ advantage by accepting procedures that are derived and controlled from elsewhere. I have analysed this process to show how time and indirect control have enabled Islander representatives to manipulate the situation to pressure governments for a greater say in Islanders’ affairs to its present “situation” of contemplating self-government. It includes long term development of local resources for sustainable local use as a management tool for controlling Torres Strait Islanders’ self-determination. Thus, whatever the intention of colonial Queensland in the 1879 annexation, it restricted Torres Strait Islanders from competing in a global economy and by permitting Islanders a dependent semi-autonomy through representative politics. Support for these conclusions can be found in Beckett (1987, p. 185):

Welfare colonialism entails a political process since its ideology requires consultation with, and the consent of its subjects. Queensland already had such an apparatus in Torres Strait, but the Commonwealth intervention in 1973 decisively altered the balance of power in which the processes functioned. The intervention of the Commonwealth broke this monopoly giving the Islanders considerable room to manoeuvre with the two governments competing to provide assistance, their [Island representatives] bargaining power is inevitably increased with their approval required to give legitimacy to government practise, their voice have become valuable resource [and] Taking advantage of these opportunities, however, have placed new demands on Islander representatives.

Local History and Islander Advancement

The problem for Torres Strait Islanders in their current situation is historically based in terms of self-determination and, as such, successive governments have continued to work with local representatives to comprehend the ‘needs and wants’, when Islanders protest openly and non-aggressively to governments (Mullins, 1994; Beckett, 1987; Sharp, 1993; Singe, 1979). Thus, in the 1980s, the Queensland

Government, after receiving strong advice from Island leaders, relinquished control of its investment (infrastructures) agency, the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (DIAI), in Torres Strait to the Island Councils permitting Islanders partial management of the organisation. The consequence of this move was to restore government authority by effectively causing the Island Councils to remain under existing Queensland legislation, the Community Services (Torres Strait Islanders) Act 1984. Restricting how effectively the Island Councils can carry out their tasks for Islander self-management, made it possible for Island leaders to lobby the State and Federal governments for a greater say in Torres Strait affairs. Arthur's (1998, pp. 28 – 29) examination of the effects of the Torres Strait Treaty between Papua New Guinea and Australia stated that:

Torres Strait, as part of the Australian nation-state has become comparatively developed - a situation that no doubt helps explain why Islanders have, since the beginning of negotiation over the border, often stated the desire to achieve greater autonomy but also to remain part of Australia. This is not to deny that the standard of facilities such as water, housing and medical services is lower in the Strait than those on the [Australian] mainland.

Islanders' approach to both the State and Commonwealth governments throughout the 1980s, included claims for equality and the need for governments to recognise Torres Strait Islanders as an Indigenous culture, beside but different from Aboriginal people. Island communities needed better services such as new government-run stores with fresh and processed food, modern housing, modern schools, better health service, up to date land and sea transport and other social benefits. One of the key issues raised by Island leaders, according to Kaye (1997, p. 150), was that:

Since the latter half of the 1980s, there have been increasing calls for a greater degree of self-government in the region partly arisen from a perception that the Strait has been over-governed ... [and] ... Although the Islanders have not demanded a rollback or withdrawal of the services these (government) agencies provide, they feel that more localised control over such arrangement would be more practical and efficient and would reflect to a far greater extent their community's needs.

Inevitably, local control of government services for Torres Strait Islanders continued under government control that propelled Islander communities in Torres Strait into a society of needs and wants in a geography of isolation. Beckett (1987, p. 13), in his definition of the historical situation of Torres Strait Islanders, notes that:

A colonial order arises when the state which has annexed a territory formally and systematically discriminates between the conquering and subject groups,

in such a way as to entrench the differences between them and to foster their economic, political and cultural inequality. Discrimination is sustained by some form of ideology which justifies the domination of the Indigenous population [Torres Strait Islanders] in terms of differences of race, mentality, moral qualities, cultural advancement or religion.

Subsequently, the Islands representatives' advice to government towards the end of the 1980s was part of a larger dialogue that convinced the Commonwealth Federal government to create a different type of administration to manage the interests of Torres Strait Islanders in Torres Strait. The Commonwealth Government introduced a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agency in 1989. The new agency, established as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), with the purpose to address both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people's disadvantages at a national level. The creation of a national Indigenous representative body by the Australian Government became a political instrument that would attain two of the most important ends for any government:

The enhancements of their own claim to legitimacy by endowing themselves with mission for creating nation states ... [and]... the use of their claim to legitimacy to hold down protests prevent[ing] generalised symbols such as [socio-economic conditions, custom and tradition] from spreading to all sorts of grievances" (Etzioni & Etzioni-Halevy 1973, p. 238).

The establishment of ATSIC meant the merger of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs under the ATSIC Act 1989. In 1992, it brought criticism from some Island leaders who were dissatisfied with the ATSIC setup and pressured the Commonwealth to provide a separate Torres Strait agency. To make the issue public, Island leaders, as ATSIC representatives emphasised their cultural differences from Aboriginal people. The 10th Session of the Working group on Indigenous Populations met in Geneva on 20 – 31 July 1992. The Elder/Statesman, Mr. George Mye, who was the Torres Strait Commissioner in ATSIC, attended the session with other Islander representatives and was quoted in the *Torres News*:

... it is about time the government started to recognise the distinct difference between the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and treated the two races of people accordingly; 'We the Torres Strait people are distinct: geographically, socially, culturally, politically and territorially [and] Although we have a warm and supportive relationship with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters, we don't want to be classified as the same race of people' he said. (*Torres News*, 14 – 20, August 1992, p. 3)

The creation of ATSIC in 1992 did not distract Torres Strait leaders from pursuing a

Torres Strait Islander agency for Torres Strait. In 1994 a federal agency known as the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA), was established by the Commonwealth Government within the ATSIC Act 1987, with legislated responsibility to represent not only the interests of Torres Strait Islanders but also to include the Aboriginal people in the Torres Strait region. Since the creation of the TSRA, Indigenous spending on a national level was increased to accommodate the inclusion of TSRA besides the ATSIC. In May 2003, The Federal Member for Leichhardt, Warren Entsch commented publicly in the local newspaper (*Torres News*) saying “As we expected, the Budget was a very tough Budget but it was equally a responsible Budget” and according to the local newspaper:

The Budget has increased the amount of indigenous community funding to \$2.5 billion in 2002 – 2003, up from \$2.4 billion last year [2001 – 2002]. Funding for ATSIC has increased by \$30 million to \$1.6 billion this year to help the commission offset the cost of holding 35 regional elections. Mr. Entsch said the Government was able to provide substantial initiatives for Australia’s indigenous communities without sacrificing existing programs that effect the Torres Strait (*Torres News* 24 -30 May, 2003).

The Commonwealth Government’s spending on the welfare and social needs of Islanders in the Torres Strait is accounted for by the effective political lobbying of Islander representatives as social development initiatives. In my earlier analysis of the literature, I quoted Nakata (1997) as an example of political achievements, achieved in time, by Island leaders for Torres Strait Islanders. In the next section I examine the three tier system of governance as a major political strategy by Island leaders gained through the representative process.

The Three Tiers of Governance: The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA), Island Coordinating Council (ICC), and the Island Community Councils (ICCs).

The History

Currently in Torres Strait there are three tiers of government agencies for the Indigenous people. They are: The Island Community Councils (ICCs), the Island Coordinating Council (ICC) and the TSRA. The TSRA was created from the ATSIC Act 1989 when the ATSIC was operational. On board the TSRA sits the elected representatives (Island Council members) who were voted into office on these Island Councils by the Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal peoples, elected to manage their designated Island communities as local government and, while holders of the TSRA

office, these representatives have been permitted by both governments to conduct the whole of Torres Strait affairs in conjunction with the two regionalised government agencies: the ICCs and the ICC. Both these agencies are under state jurisdiction of Queensland, whereas the TSRA is under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth. The representative process is complex although based on advice from Islander leaders. The TSRA portfolio within the ATSIC Act 1989 contains provisional clauses clause that permits the inclusions of each of the Island Council Chairpersons as Board-Members. These members are not voted in by their respective communities for TSRA positions; accordingly, they are automatically placed on board the TSRA. The same principle exists for the ICC. Inevitably, from an insider's perspective, it seems the legislative arrangements for representational politics is one elected chairperson from each of the identified Torres Strait region as legislated in the *ATSIC Ac 1989* and the arrangement is for the ICCs to have their Island chairpersons placed on the ICC members under the *Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984*. Thus, in contrast to the active lobbying of Island leaders for Islanders' self-management, from a political perspective, legislations have placed Torres Strait Islanders and the Islands duly under control and accountable both to the State of Queensland and the Commonwealth of Australia. The ATSIC no longer exists as an Indigenous entity

The Functions of the Torres Strait Regional Authority

The TSRA was established through a funding arrangement with mainland ATSIC representatives, when Island leaders as representatives succeeded in their claim to receive direct fiscal support from the Federal Government to advance Torres Strait Islanders' pathway to self-determination. With the support of Queensland's regional agencies in Torres Strait, a working agreement was made between the ICCs, the ICC and with the State and Federal Governments with regards to operational arrangements for developing the Islands. I discuss this later in terms of corporate arrangements. As set out in Section 142A of the *ATSIC Ac 1984*, the TSRA consists of the twenty Indigenous members and has a number of functions and. Commonwealth funds are used in partnership with the Queensland Government to upgrade water supplies, village sewerage systems, the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and other programs including State and Federal Government education and training systems. The roles of TSRA office holders

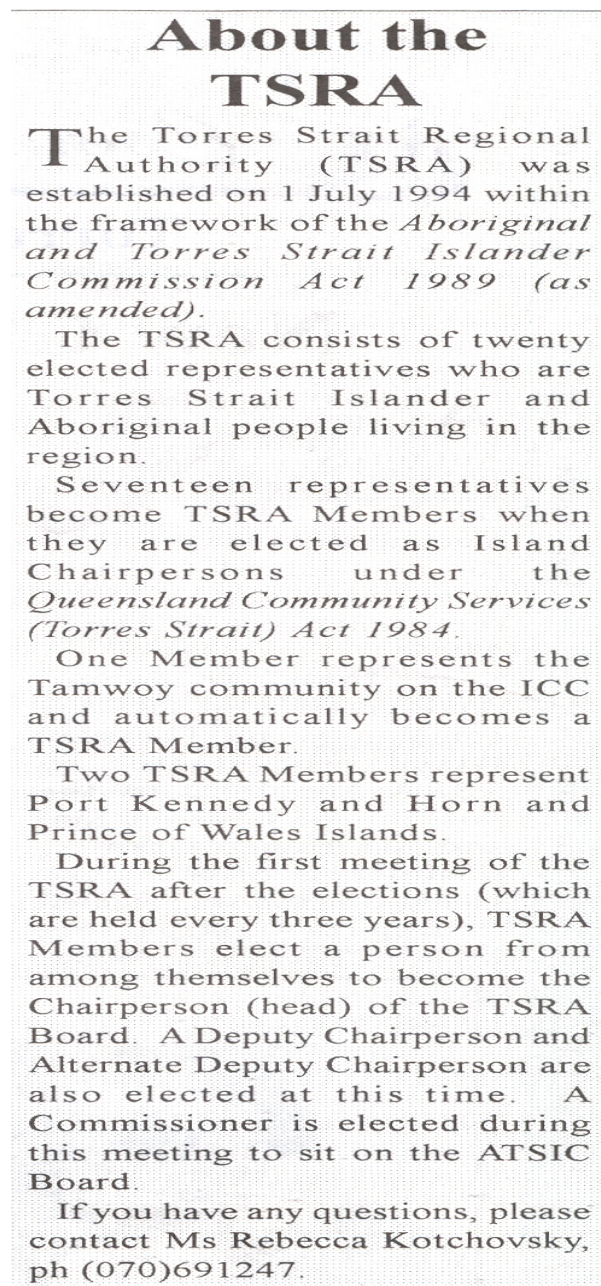
(Island Council Chairpersons) are to provide policies and planning within TSRA jurisdiction. They are required to provide the Federal Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs with advice on local infrastructure needs and, in addition, to promote and exhibit Islander culture and tradition to the wider communities. Fiscal management, secretarial and administration support are the responsibility of the agency, which is staffed by Commonwealth public servants (including Indigenous Torres Strait Islanders). The TSRA carries out its operations in conjunction with the state representative bodies (dual functions) with local and regional responsibilities; through the Island Community Councils (ICCs) with an overall regional representation vested in the Island Coordinating Council (ICC). The complicated decision making structure of the TSRA consists of office holders, the Island Council Chairpersons, who are the representative's board-members from the ICC and ICCs. They are the Chairpersons of the Island Councils, who since being elected, now take on additional tasks as political representatives within the ICCs, ICC and the TSRA. The following notice, as recorded in Figure 2, is an example of the inner workings of the TSRA. It gives an overall picture of how "representation" is strategically fitted in terms of Islander leadership as "political representivity".

The Dual Functions of the Island Community Councils and the Island Coordinating Council with the Torres Strait Regional Authority

I have noted that the State of Queensland regional agency in Torres Strait, the Island Coordinating Council (ICC), combines all the Island Community Councils (ICCs) into one and the members (the same persons from both organisations) sit as the board members of the TSRA, a regionalised Commonwealth arrangement. Both the ICC and the ICCs are incorporated under the *Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984* funded by the Queensland Government whose roles are local government, community governance and essential services: water supplies; road works; housing, health and education, and to develop community based projects on their Islands (see Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5).

From my analysis of the local situation, I developed a model and present in Figure 3 a brief insight as to how these institutions operate in Torres Strait. Torres Strait is at the centre of this model with dark indicators (arrows) pointing to the Commonwealth of Australia and State of Queensland and back into Torres Strait. This symbol

Figure 2: The make-up of Torres Strait Regional Authority



(*About the TSRA* 1997, p. 2)

indicates that both governments are the major stakeholders in regional governance of Torres Strait. The Torres Strait communities are listed at the bottom with indicators pointing to the TSRA, the ICC and the ICCs then to the Commonwealth and State Governments, connecting other government and non- government agencies, pointing back to the Torres Strait communities. Their roles represent recognition by governments of traditional rights and the local entities represents community issues being presented by Island leaders to governments and other agencies on matters

affecting the social, cultural, economics and infrastructure developments for Torres Strait Islanders. At the same time, the indicators connect the TSRA with the ICC and the ICCs and the Native Title Office with Traditional Land Owners, the Torres Strait communities, where all community and traditional matters goes to both governments through their representative channels, with outcomes filtering back to their relevant communities. The model suggests that a greater autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders will not be achieved within the current system and, presented as Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5, can be considered as the achievements of political representivity to governments. It shows that the administrative setup strategically links all of the Torres Strait affairs immediately under the auspices of Island leaders with direct connections to both the State and Commonwealth Governments. The model will provide some advice to my people as to how a greater autonomy will work for them in the future. Moreover, it is interesting to note that since the restructuring of the TSRC into the TSRA, the former council's annual report for 1993-94 records fiscal spending on Torres Strait programs of \$27, 498, 066 million with a further announcement in 1997 by the TSRA for upgrading Torres Strait infrastructures for essential services at \$24 million dollars that have been allocated annually by Canberra (Torres Strait Regional Council Annual Report 1993-1994 & 1996-1997). My argument can be measured against the political representative's view point of Mrs. Mau, the Deputy Chairperson of TSRA who insists:

We will continue to work with interest groups from industry, community and government in our approach during 2003 and together we will achieve positive outcomes in economic development, assertion of our indigenous rights, native title, health, community services, and protection of our environment and further improvement of our living standards
(*Torres News* 7-13 Feb 2003, p. 5)

The ICC has eighteen members on the council who advise the Queensland Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care, as well as to other departments on issues directly related to Island Councils' matters and community issues. The ICC members comprise elected Chairpersons from the Island Councils and one community representative of the Tamwoy, Rose Hill, Aplin, Waiben and Quarantine communities (TRAWQ) on Thursday Island. These members oversee Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal affairs in the Torres Strait. Those Torres Strait Islanders living on the mainland are outsiders and are not included in the daily affairs of the administration and not permitted to vote or run as candidates.

Figure 3: A suggested model for political representivity and representation in Torres Strait

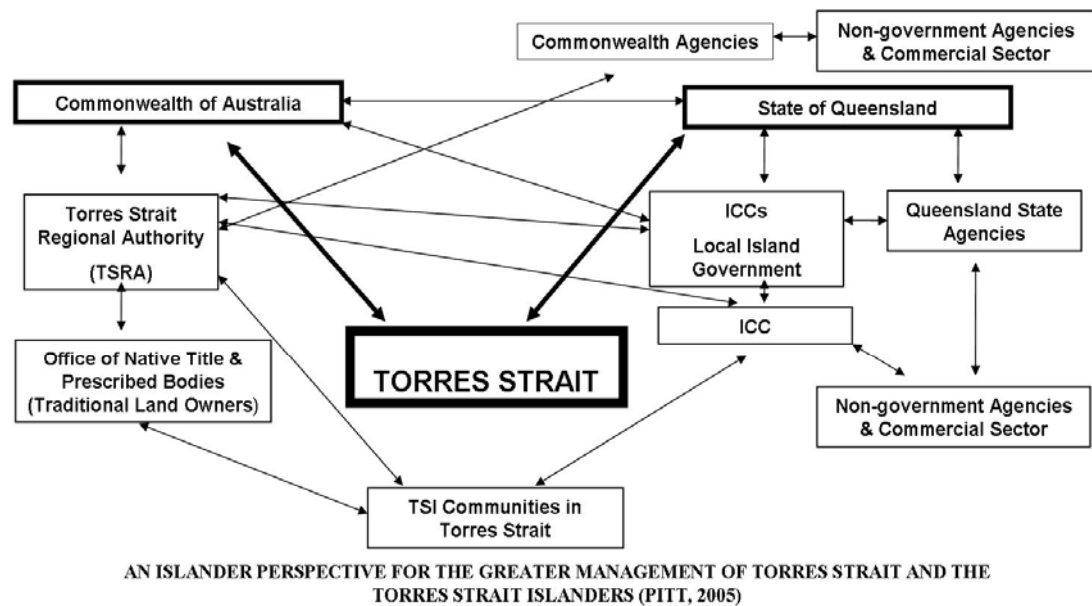


Figure 4: State Budget

More Support for Emergency Services in 2002-3 Budget

During his visit to the region last week, Emergency Services Minister Mike Reynolds said more support would be given to emergency services operating on the Cape and in the Torres Strait.

Mr Reynolds' first stop was at Bamaga to officially open the Queensland Ambulance Service's (QAS) Northern Peninsula Area (Bamaga) Ambulance station.

He then travelled to the outer islands to meet with staff and volunteers.

On Thursday Island the Minister attended a combined QAS, State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service function where he announced that the 2002-3 budget, which was released on Tuesday, would fund a QAS field officer to be based on Horn Island. Housing has already been established on the island and the position will be advertised shortly.

This budget also includes a 'volunteer support package' giving a record amount of money to support volunteer emergency

services in rural areas.

"Many of our volunteers have full-time jobs, many have family commitments and many have spare time interests," Mr Reynolds said.

"However, when there is an emergency to deal with, when there is training or maintenance to be done, when there is a job to do for the community, our volunteers make that their number one priority."

He congratulated the Horn Island Emergency Services Unit on their recent win in the Far North Rescue Competition held at Ravenshoe last month.

The Minister said pending the budget release six rural fire service training officers would be appointed across the State in 2002, with one dedicated to Indigenous communities throughout Cape York and the Torres Strait. Existing Rural Fire Training Officer for the Far North Region Tony Hayes, will fill this additional position which is based in Cairns. He will be replaced in his current capacity.

Furthermore, a part-time Indigenous SEU Training Officer is to be based in Cairns in addition to one existing full-timer.

"As a North Queensland resident and politician, the welfare of our indigenous people has always been a matter close to my heart," Mr Reynolds said.

(continued on page 3)

2002-03 State Budget Allocations

The Beattie Government this week released its 2002-03 State Budget. A breakdown of some of the funds allocated to the Torres Strait and NPA in areas including *Health, Education, Transport, Cape York Justice Reforms and Other...* have been summarised below. Additional budget information will be published in next week's *Torres News*.

Health:

- * \$1 million for the creation of 18 new Indigenous health positions as part of the ATSI Primary Health Care Program, including 12 child health and nutrition workers who will initially focus on Cape York and the NPA;
- * \$200,000 for a diabetes specialist to provide an outreach service to the Indigenous communities of Cape York, the Torres Strait and remote centres of the Cairns Health Service District;
- * \$224,000 for TI Hospital to upgrade health technology. This funding will allow \$190,000 worth of equipment including an ultrasonography machine, \$10,000 for surgical instruments, and two \$12,000 ECG pagewriting machines for operating theatres;
- * \$5,600 for hydrogym knee exercise equipment for patients after knee surgery and in rehabilitation at Horn Island Primary Health Care; and
- * Centrifuge machines for pathology services, costing \$2,500 each, will be purchased for 16 primary health care centres on Stephen, Saibai, Yorke, Yam, Warraber, Coconut, Boigu, Badu and Darnley Islands, as well as St Pauls and Kubin villages on Moa Island.

Education:

- * 1.256 million for the redevelopment of the Bamaga State School administration building;
- * \$1.3 million to air-condition Yam Island State School, as well as one other in the Cook Shire;
- * \$1.5 for teacher housing at Saibai Island State School, Yam Island State School and Yorke Island State School; and
- * Badu, Coconut, Dauan and Darnley Island State Schools will receive repair work during the coming year.

Transport:

- * \$630,000 for further upgrading of the Badu Island access road between the airstrip and the barge ramp;
- * \$470,000 to upgrade section of the Darnley Island access road to bitumen seal and to improve drainage. Training for local residents will also be provided during the project;
- * \$780,000 to pave and seal the Dauan Island access road;
- * For Moa Island, \$250,000 for improvements and maintenance for the Kubin community access road and \$480,000 for improvements to the St Paul's community access road; \$360,000 to continue upgrading drainage, formation and gravel on sections of the Mabuig Island access road, between the township, airport and boat ramp. A training component is also included;
- * \$355,000 to continue a project to form, gravel and seal sections of the Murray Island access road; and
- * \$130,000 for a range of projects in Torres Shire, including improvements to bus set-down areas at the Horn Island childcare and pre-school centre; a project to improve drainage, pave and seal Hargrave Street on Thursday Island; and improve pedestrian facilities on Victoria Parade.

Cape York Justice Study Reforms

The 2002-03 budget includes total funding of \$108 million for the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy (DATSIP).

\$10 million will be allocated to help compensate for payment of under award wages to Indigenous Queenslanders on top of the \$32 million not included in this budget that has already been given.

\$1 million of DATSIP's funding will be used to facilitate economic development, mainly in Deed-of-Grant-in-Trust communities.

Justice Study initiatives to receive funding include:

- * \$1 million to strengthen and expand the Local Justice Initiatives Program;
- * \$0.13 million to fund the transfer of canteen licences from local councils to community based boards;
- * \$0.5 million to employ environment health workers in

(continued on page 7)

Continued on page 59

(Torres News, 21-27 June 2002, p.1 & 5)

2002-03 State Budget Allocations... (cont'd from pg. 5)

isolated Indigenous communities;

The budget will also fund DATSIP's work on a range of ongoing initiatives including:

- * \$9 million to continue delivery of water, sewerage and health-related infrastructure to isolated and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and

- * \$4 million to complete the upgrade of the Island Board of Industries retail stores.

Other budget initiatives include:

- * \$750,000 from the Department of State Development towards the Cape York Economic Development

Strategy, to develop business opportunities in the region; and

- * \$181,000 for QBuild, the government's minor works and maintenance organisation within the Department of Public Works, to coordinate a training program for 20 indigenous apprentices in the Indigenous communities including Bamaga, New Mapoon, Umagico and Injinoo.

- * \$21.3 million under the Aboriginal Housing Rental Program to maintain the employment of almost 50 tradespeople and 41 apprentices and provide: 58 new dwellings in mainland Queensland, 13 new dwellings on Thursday Island and 150 upgrade projects;

- * \$1 million to continue the trial to assess the impact of transferring responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community police from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councils to the service. The Beattie Government is giving ongoing consideration to this police program that involves Indigenous officers working

under the supervision of police to detect and deter crime in remote communities. The pilot Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Police program (QATSIP) has been in place in three remote communities since February 2000. QATSIP officers are in place at Badu Island, Woorabinda and Yarrabah;

(Torres News, 21-27 June 2002, p.7)

Figure 5: Federal Budget

\$24 million Spent on Torres Strait Infrastructure

Since the establishment of the TSRA on 1 July 1994, over \$24 million has been spent by the TSRA on infrastructure in the Torres Strait region. This does not include money spent on CDEP, which is the TSRA's biggest funded program.

All the money spent by the TSRA was decided by the TSRA Members (ie the Chairperson of your community). Here are some of the bigger infrastructure projects the TSRA has spent money on:

- Water Upgrade** The TSRA started a \$10 million Water Upgrade project for seven of the outer islands in October 1994, and finished in

\$24m Spent on Infrastructure

Continued from page 1

Australian Federal Police (AFP) presence in the Torres Strait to stop cross border drug and firearm offenses which are affecting peoples' lives and culture. As a result an AFP officer will be stationed permanently in the region.

CDEP

CDEP is a very important service the TSRA provides for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living in the region. The TSRA has developed a very effective CDEP Program with high participant numbers. There are 14 organisations on the outer islands, two on NPA and one on Thursday Island.



TSRA Elections - 22 March 1997

"Have Your Say in the TSRA - Make Your Vote Count!"

early 1996. The TSRA has committed an extra \$8 million to the second stage of the project (costing \$16 million) which will upgrade water infrastructure on the remaining eight outer islands. The TSRA is currently negotiating with the Queensland Government to fund the extra \$8 million.

- Business and Housing Loans** The TSRA helps Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people to set up their own businesses or buy their own homes and has provided many business loans under the Business Funding Scheme (BFS) and community enterprise loans under the Community Economic Initiative Scheme (CEIS). The TSRA has helped a car rental business, supermarkets, takeaway food outlets, trade industries, and people involved in commercial fishing.
- Grants for Tamwoy and Port Kennedy Community Halls** In 1996 the TSRA granted \$552,000 to Tamwoy for the construction of a community hall. Port Kennedy was also granted \$374,000 to build a community hall on Thursday Island.
- Bamaga Housing and Sewerage Projects** The TSRA is striving to provide people living in the region with essential basic services, and in August 1996 funded a \$4 million sewerage scheme in Bamaga. It will be finished by June this year. The TSRA also granted \$4 million to Bamaga to replace old existing housing in the community.

The TSRA also consults with and advises other Government agencies who provide services in the Torres Strait region. For example:

- Health Framework Agreement** The TSRA is concerned about the health of people living in the Torres Strait and is negotiating a Health Framework Agreement with the Queensland and Commonwealth Ministers for Health. The agreement will increase Government commitment of resources to improve the health of people living in the Torres Strait.
- AFP Presence in Torres Strait** The TSRA called for the permanent establishment of an

Above: 1997 TSRA Election Poster, more on page 2 Continued page 2

(‘\$24 million Spent on Torres Strait Infrastructure’ 1997, p.1-2)

The Corporate Arrangement

The business arrangements between the Commonwealth and State run agencies in Torres Strait present ample opportunity for a duplication of services in serving the needs of their communities. These institutions, administered by Islander representatives approximate the description of those who represent the interests of governments universally: “New activities, norms, rewards and sanctions - money, political position, and prestige based on occupation” (Etzioni & Etzioni-Halevy 1973, p. 280). It brings into question the formation of TSRA, the ICCs and the ICC. It is a unique piece of legislation under the Australian model of governing ‘one man, one vote’ system and only exists in Torres Strait. There is no conflict of interests in this system, in that the difference between the TSRA and the ICC and ICCs is that they are formally three separate institutions and report to two different governments, the State and Commonwealth. There is no perceived conflict of interest because the same Island person who was voted to be the Island Chairperson has been granted the right of office to the other two bodies. Overall, both governments under this system support the welfare economic services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait people in the region.

The concept is different from the electoral process used in the election requirements for the ATSIC Regional Councils on the mainland, where the people’s votes are scrutinised by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). However, there are inclusions in the AEC to accommodate the voting system in the Island communities for Island Council Members. The decision to place Council members on the TSRA Board is implemented in Section 142S: (2) (a) of the *ATSIC Act*: “Provision for some or all of the members of the TSRA to be persons elected under the Queensland Act to represent particular communities in the Torres Strait”. Furthermore, the *ATSIC Act* permits two representatives from the Horn and Thursday Island regions to be voted onto the TSRA by their constituents, through the AEC electoral process. It is in contrast to the non-elected TSRA position required for each Island Chairpersons’ to represent particular Island community on the TSRA. From my examination of the unique election process in the Islands, this stems from the demands in the mid 1970s when Island leaders, through the ICC, advised governments regarding Torres Strait for:

An increased recognitions of their status has been accompanied by calls for a

greater say in the governance of the Strait generally and their own affairs in particular. Demands for reform have ranged from administrative changes to the modification of certain laws applicable in the region and even calls for complete independence. (Kaye, 1997, p. 135)

According to Sharp (1993, p. 245) gaining recognition meant the then Chairperson of the ICC, Getano Lui Junior in 1988 laid claims for “direct control of land and resources and a recognition of the legal rights of Islanders to determine and regulate who comes into Torres Strait to fish, to mine, or to develop tourism.” It seems the political outcome for administrative change was strategically influenced by the colonial ideology of control and, in non Island term: ‘letting the left hand know of what the right hand is doing’. The following figures demonstrate the administrative outcomes for Island leaders on board the TRSA, the ICC and the ICCs. This total ‘representation’ that governs internal issues through inputs and to receiving external support for outcomes, I include as Figures 6/7/8 details of how legislation has given Islander leaders immense representative powers in conducting Islander affairs throughout the Torres Strait.

A New Deal: The Local Plan for Islander Autonomy

The need for a coordinated approach to government by Island leaders, caused the Commonwealth Government in 1997 to announce a ‘New Deal’ for Torres Strait Islanders. The new deal contains basic blueprints for having Torres Strait become a new state or territory of Australia as reported by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Making Torres Strait a state or a territory of the Commonwealth of Australia its government will be a Regional Assembly voted in by all residents in the Torres Strait region. The Commonwealth’s strategy has eliminated the prospect of Indigenous self-determination, and the Islanders’ legitimate claim against the nation state to their traditional homelands; meaning the autonomy process to Islander’s rights of claim is partial.

The Commonwealth’s concept for a Regional Assembly has been articulated to reflect the colonial framework of the Torres Strait Islander Act of 1939 for taking Torres Strait Islanders: “From total restriction to limited autonomy ...[it]... formalised the provisions of ‘indirect rule’ in the ‘New Law’ for Islanders as a

Figure 6:

Who Makes the Decisions?

The people of the Torres Strait decide where the money is spent. Their voices are heard through their elected representatives, who sit on the TSRA Board.

How do you elect a TSRA Member for the Outer Islands?

If you live in a community with an Island Council, when you elect a Chairperson for your community, that Chairperson sits on the ICC and automatically becomes a Member of the TSRA.

How do you become Chairperson and Commissioner of the TSRA?

At the first meeting of the TSRA, after the elections, all Members vote for a person to become the Chairperson (head) of the TSRA Board. If you are not a Member of the TSRA, then you cannot be voted in as Chairperson. A Deputy Chairperson, Alternate Deputy Chairperson and a Commissioner to sit on the ATSIIC Board are also elected at this time. The Commissioner becomes the Chairperson of the Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board (TSIAB) for mainland Torres Strait Islander people. This provides a link between Torres Strait Islander people living on the mainland and the Torres Strait region.

(Who Makes the Decisions? 1997, p.2)

Figure 7

Questions and Answers - the TSRA & Elections

Q. What is the TSRA?


A. The TSRA:

- ✓ is an independent Commonwealth Government Statutory Authority formed on 1 July 1994;
- ✓ consists of a Board of 20 Members and an administrative arm; and
- ✓ reports directly to the Commonwealth Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

Q. What Does the TSRA Do?

A. The TSRA:

- ✓ allocates grants and loans to help improve the quality of life for people living in the region;
- ✓ consults and advises other Government agencies who provide services in the region;
- ✓ promotes the rights, customs and identity of Torres Strait Islanders.



Q. Who is running the TSRA elections?

A. The Australian Electoral Commission.

Q. How can I find out more about the TSRA elections?

A. You can telephone Gordon Taylor who is the Returning Officer for the Australian Electoral Commission (Ph: 51-7188).

Q. When are the TSRA elections?

A. Saturday 22 March 1997.

Q. How many electorates are there for the TSRA elections?

A. Two:

1. Thursday Island (Port Kennedy) Community; and
2. Horn and Prince of Wales Islands.

Q. What elections are happening on the outer islands in March 1997?

A. Island Council elections will be held on Saturday 15 March 1997. These are separate to the TSRA elections, however the elected Chairperson of an Island Council automatically gains a seat on the TSRA.

Q. If I live on Thursday Island (TI), do I vote in the Tamwoy election or the TSRA election for Port Kennedy?

A. If you are a member of the Tamwoy community, you can vote for a Tamwoy representative on the ICC on 15 March 1997. This person becomes a representative on the TSRA. Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living on TI, who are not entitled to vote for the Tamwoy representative on 15 March 1997, can vote in the TSRA election for Port Kennedy on 22 March 1997, provided they are on the Commonwealth Electoral Roll for Thursday Island.

(Questions and Answers – the TSRA & Elections 1997, p.3)

Figure 8:

Differences Between the TSRA & ICC		
The TSRA and the ICC are totally separate bodies, and answer to different governments and Ministers. They have different functions and provide different services to people living in the Torres Strait.	There is one important link between the TSRA and the ICC. This is that ICC Members automatically become Members of the TSRA. So, when a person is elected to the position of Chairperson of an Island Council, they	become a Member of the ICC and that person then automatically becomes a TSRA Member. This ensures a coordinated (or joint) approach to providing community services and projects to the region.

(*Differences Between the TSRA & ICC* 1997, p.3)

separate people” as explained by Sharp (1993, p. 214). Showing support for the announcement, the TSRA Islander representatives advised governments that Torres Strait Islanders were prepared to achieve autonomy by the year 2001; yet the outer Islands are without an independent economic base necessary for serious participation. In the meantime, the TSRA members (Islanders’ representatives) whose use of traditional (local) and contemporary politics continued their lobbying by formulating a development plan for Indigenous Torres Strait:

The Torres Strait Development Plan, formerly known as the regional plan, was designed by the Regional Council and sets out the goals that the region should achieve until the year 2001. The Plan also serves as a useful tool for all organisations in the region, government and non-government that want to plan their own progress to fit in with the overall development of the Torres Strait (Torres Strait Regional Council Annual Report 1993-1994).

My analysis suggests that the representivity process has created a new class of leaders who ‘know how to talk to white man’ (Beckett 1987), whose local representation is seen by other Torres Strait Islanders to be allied with political power and resources. This is noted in the comments of one Islander in the local news: “We are setting up our own government so why should we allow non-Islanders to profit from our resources, industries and other business [and] TSRA and ICC members are still bowing down to their “great white chief” (Newie 2002). The criticism of Island leaders by other Islanders is an ongoing process throughout the internal politics of Torres Strait. Local advice and ideas by others are seen as political and religious criticisms within the concept of Ailan Kustom. Bearing on this, in 2003, comments made in the *Torres News* about leadership in Torres Strait lodged in the Editor’s column substantiate my claim:

As we move closer to greater autonomy there are [a] number of issues we

will face. There are numbers of real and present dangers that threatened our territorial integrity. The Queensland Government public works on our lands, our struggle for traditional food [seafood and] fishing rights and the coming Land Summit organised by the TSRA. The real key issue to sorting out our solutions for these issues starts with voting for the best leaders at March 2004 elections. If we get the right answers to self-determination and legitimate self-government follows automatically. But we don't want are leaders who will be boss-man for everyone else. How many times have we seen that happen? When leaders in the past fought over who will be boss-man, nearly everything that benefits us came to a standstill and we suffered. So this time if we don't vote in the best leaders who we know are honest and open and work hard to lead us to autonomy, we only have our selves to blame. How do we get to know who are the right leaders? If we look at our communities we see there are leaders who listen for Amen-Baba [God] to show us the way. We see leaders who have the training and expertise to talk the same language as the government and have the minds to understand their laws. We see leaders who know the traditions and culture of our people. We have leaders in the trades and professions, especially in the maritime industry and teaching, and leaders with people-skills who know how to care for our small children, school age children, our youth, our women, our men, and our aged care. We also have leaders with many skills and talents who [have] the big networks outside our region and leaders with the political skills and knowledge about how governance and administration works. Because we have all these leaders it's no big deal if we don't have the expertise or knowledge we need on greater autonomy or legitimate self-government. For this to work properly we all should know who these leaders are, so we know who to vote for? (K. Savage 2003, p. 16)

Irrespective of local Islanders' protest, the representative arm of the TSRA has continued with their preparation by producing a second plan for the management of Torres Strait that would bring an autonomous government for all the residents as one people/nation through coexistence. This meant that the shift for a detached Torres Strait Islander autonomy from other Australians was watered down by the Aboriginal leaders in ATSIC in 1997. ATSIC submitted a briefing paper to the Commonwealth stating the autonomy process must be negotiated with the Queensland Government and the people affected:

The final option must involve giving equal rights to all the people living in the area, whether they are Torres Strait Islanders, Aboriginal or non-indigenous. It is important that the government set up mechanisms to ensure that Aboriginal living in the Torres Strait area preserve their rights and entitlements when greater autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders themselves are negotiated. (Submission from ATSIC February, 1997, p. 4)

The change of tactics between Aboriginal leaders in ATSIC and the TSRA Islander representatives for Islanders' autonomy in Torres Strait is obvious in political

comments made by past leaders to governments:

We will not be satisfied with mere passive integration of our own leadership structure with some externally conceived and dictated organisation, but we propose to deal independently with all levels and areas of government and politics through our own system. (as cited in Beckett, 1987, p. 196)

And this has been the case in the present situation for Torres Strait Islanders as they rely on their leaders for meaningful outcomes for their future.

The Meaning of Representivity

The Islanders' situation brings into question how the notion of 'representivity' can be used to guide the administration of Torres Strait and the Islanders' desire for autonomy. This is reflected in the actions of effective lobbying in promoting Ailan Kustom, the Islander way of doing things, and accepted by governments as cultural protocols for representing Torres Strait Islander issues. This has made Island leaders come to rely on both the State and Commonwealth governments for support as they lead their Islander constituents towards achieving their goals. The concept concedes the influence of 'representivity' to be ongoing which brings into focus my argument based on Beckett's (1987, p. 185) recognition that the intervention of the Commonwealth Government in 1973 broke the Queensland's monopoly of control over Islander affairs, providing Islanders a far greater opportunity:

The Islanders [Island leaders] now has considerable room to manoeuvre with the two governments competing to provide assistance, their bargaining powers are inevitably increased. And with the approval required to give legitimacy to government practises, their voices have become a valuable resource. Taking advantages of these opportunities, however, has placed new demands on Islander representatives.

Beckett's descriptions of the new demands on Islander representatives, supports my claim on political representivity. It is how Island leaders today deliver the affairs of my people to governments; undermining these outcomes is how Islander leaders interpret 'self-determination' to their constituents. It is bargained to Torres Strait Islanders with a whole range of meanings: the rights of traditional land holders, native title (traditional land/sea rights), community development, economic development initiatives, or presented in such a way with a bigger picture for a greater autonomy through the representative processes of the TSRA, the ICC and the ICCs.

Inevitably, viewed from my position as an insider, Island leaders practise "political

representivity” (Weaver 1985) as opinion leaders. This mirrors indirect control, a colonial component of representation through institutional arrangements. It is necessary to interpret the meaning of ‘representivity’ using the concept from Weaver (1985, p. 143), who examined political representivity in Indigenous communities of Canada and Australia. Leaders are understood by Weaver to be the active ‘representative voice’ of traditional historical leaders chosen within their societies to represent the local people as mediators. Representivity is displayed openly through the democratic or traditional process, and Weaver observed the position made possible the opportunity for prestige and status by three fold representations:

In the first meaning a (native) organisation is considered to be representative if it is seen to represent the views, needs and aspirations of its constituency to the government and the public ... In the second meaning, a (native) organisation is seen to be politically representative if it is *representative* of its constituency. In other words, the members of the organisation are expected to be a social microcosm of its constituency, particular its “politically important social characteristics...underlying the notion of “social” representivity is the belief that if an organisation’s members replicate their constituents, the organisation will be more sensitive to their needs and goals and therefore able to convey them accurately to the government and the public ... The third meaning stresses representativeness by *responsiveness*; whether the organisation actually responds to the needs and demands of its constituency by providing services needed or expected by the constituency. As such it involves more than formal accountability (Weaver 1985, p. 114).

Overall, Weaver’s (1985) account of “representivity” suggests that representivity is a political resource that governments can award or withdraw. Indigenous leaders, like government personnel, can use representivity to protect and promote their own interests. In Torres Strait, representivity is the voice for Torres Strait Islanders and that voice is officially made through the elected leaders who have numerous roles through which they can convey political and cultural opinion to government and other agencies. The manner of representation and action by contemporary leaders is quite different from Island leaders of the 1930s. For example, Islander leaders of the 1930s forcefully represented their people’s struggles for equality and recognition, but they received no support from government or its agencies; “[s]o great has become the resentful feeling of the natives – though naturally as between island and island they are not sympathetically disposed towards each other – they have “solidified” on the

matter of their treatment by the Protection Department”. (Sharp 1993: 182)¹⁷ In contrast to the Island leaders of today, they are significantly modern in their representation. They are in receipt of public service remuneration (sitting fees, travel allowances or salary) for their roles as official representatives for their communities. Such government incentives are inducements for those to continue represent their people. And they create a dependence on their inducements and incentives that can easily make leaders wary of displeasing government. Significantly, despite representational changes, Torres Strait Islander communities continue to remain under “welfare-ism” even if the objective of self-determination (a greater autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders) is the official target and, the initiatives of Island leaders for “self-determination” remain unclear to most Islanders.

The concept of self-determination espoused in the 1990s saw rapid development of programs by governments. Such an approach is derived from the past priorities formulated by the former Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, The Hon. Ian Viner, who stated in his 1978 report:

Ultimately, in the next decade, these reserve communities will become part of the normal structure of the state when they are no longer required for special use. The Commission expressly does not support separate development in areas dedicated in perpetuity only for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Peterson 1981, p. 144).

The significance of this statement is reflected in the Standing Committee Report to the Commonwealth on “A Greater Autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders” (ibid). Island communities continue to remain under the auspices of government services and their present situation for economic opportunities is slow and limited being dependent on the actions of their leaders. Torres Strait Islanders can be described as an over represented community. This is perpetuated by representational leadership that conducts local affairs through the process of: “acquiring the modesty of material requirements [by institutionalised inducements that became] a positive cultural fact, expressed in a variety of economic arrangements” (Sahlins 1972, p. 1). Sahlins is used here to focus my account of how Torres Strait Islanders’ needs are satisfied by current program arrangements between government agencies and local Islander

¹⁷ January 1936 was the turning point for Torres Strait Islanders to resent the paternalist control under the Chief Protector for Aboriginals. Most able bodied Islander seamen under the instructions of Island leaders, refused to work the boats for marine shells (pearl shells and trochus) because of partial low earnings as boat crew (Sharp 1993, p. 182).

institutions, the Island Councils, who receive their support from the ICC and the TSRA. The consequence is that when local councils initiate the subsidised government programs, the customary obligations and traditional restrictions of the Islands are ignored to make way for developments, creating a disparity between unlimited wants and insufficient means. To assess contemporary Torres Strait culture one would have to forego any claim of wholeness and agree with Beckett's impression of Ailan Kustom as "historically, it is a thing of shreds and patches, many which have come from other places over the last centuries or so" (1987, p. 4). From my research, the "concept of representation", the current methods of local governance began in the 1930s, when modern Queensland colonial policies on Aboriginal affairs progressively incorporated Island leaders as a political tool for governments in local management. According to Singe:

The Torres Strait Islander Act of 1937 in theory gave virtual home rule to Island communities, but in practise the white schoolmaster or school mistress who also enjoyed the title of government administrator, controlled each Island with a chairman and two councillors, for assistance and to act as magistrates in the village courts. (1989, p. 102)

In 1932, under the then new system (the Island Community Councils) Islander persons with traditional or historical connection were elected locally as councillors to carry out the task as government representatives not knowing the Queensland government had not relinquished any rights to Torres Strait Islanders. According to Beckett, "The incorporation of the Torres Strait Islanders within Australian society can be understood in terms of the concepts of colonialism and welfare colonialism" (1987, p. 17) and:

Under colonial rule the island community lost the sovereignty it had formerly enjoyed [having] No longer orientated towards other communities like itself, it had now looked towards a centre from which its affairs were regulated. The very land on which its people lived belonged to the Crown. Yet its occupation was undisturbed and intruders were kept out. If only because of administrative logistics, it was incorporated and vested with representative authority (Beckett 1987, p. 55).

In 1983, the former director Mr. Pat Killoran of the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement (DIAI), in his speech to the descendants of Torres Strait Islanders at Bamaga, Cape York, praised the efforts and determination of past leaders:

They were determined that you would have a better life, better food, better

homes schools and opportunities to succeed. Because of them you work less hours, earn more, have more leisure time, travel, and have a chance to follow yours dreams. These generations has made more progress than any other people in any period of time ... If this new generation can make as much progress in as many areas then it should solve many of the world illnesses. Let me say, that those who take up a positive approach deserve the highest praise, for they are truly living in the spirit of their forefathers and will be amongst the finest leaders of the north in their (*Torres Strait Islander* Issue 3, 1983).

This supports my argument that the actions of past Islander leaders encapsulate the historical precedents for future Islander advancements as a representative influence.

Self- Determination or Assimilation

The proposal of a new deal for Torres Strait Islanders is not a recent appraisal of the States' and Commonwealth's agenda throughout Australia for Indigenous self-determination. It was a model for mainstreaming the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' cultures with the wider Australian culture: "Assimilation had become entrenched as the objective of both Commonwealth and State Governments' implication that Aborigines would readily accept the role of the student to learn about and accept white culture" (Hall 1989, p. 6). Inevitably, wrote Cohen and Black in their book *Australia - a topical history* (n.d.) said the Commonwealth and State governments had proposed in the 1930s "A New Deal for the Aborigines" supported by the All White Australia policies, the segregation method for taking control of Aboriginal lifestyles and affairs. While the Commonwealth's current proposal for Torres Strait Islanders' autonomy is embraced by many Islander representatives as the mechanism for advancing Torres Strait as equal to mainstream Australia, it will mean that Islanders remain reliant on governments for fiscal support. In considering the present situation of Torres Strait Islanders, where traditional and cultural interests are addressed by political representivity, the assimilation of Islander society into a autonomous state of Torres Strait with other cultures will perpetuate disadvantage for Indigenous Islanders self-determination. A conflict of interest will arise for the current Island leaders who support coexistence in the new assembly. These leaders will carry out their office to represent the people of Torres Strait as a whole, and not their constituents' aspirations for a separate Indigenous autonomy. In support of this, the issue of self-determination for Indigenous Torres Strait has been raised publicly:

Since the 1930s or beyond Torres Strait Islanders and especially Meriams from the East advocated for a form of "control". Every time their wishes

were watered down by either, the government teachers, protectors, government officials, outside, inside Indigenous fisherman or other non-Indigenous colonialists who came for the lucrative beche-de-mer, trochus and pearl fishery. In the past the “Autonomy” and “Self-Determination” agenda was a hot issue and action was being progressed. Again the issues gone cold for the Torres Strait Autonomy as a policy item but rather a concept on “real” self-determination for more houses, water reticulation, power and sewerage system etc; that is their fiduciary duty at any time [the governments] But we see the Torres Strait is back in court defending its Native Title/Property rights. (J. Akee, *Torres News* 2003, p. 4)

Adding to the economic predicament of Islanders, most of the Islands cannot support a local economy. Their current economic situations depend on government programs in much the same way past Islanders were subjected to paternalistic control of the Protector and for Torres Strait Islanders today, their goals for self-determination is a no-win situation through the representative process. They remain dependent on the State if they are to continue down this path

Ailan Kustom or Multiculturalism

The proposal for greater autonomy is a claim for a new political administrative structure, a Regional Assembly for Torres Strait. Together with the Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people of the region, non-Islanders are included to run and voted into office. It is a collaboration agreed between TSRA representatives and the Commonwealth for a joint approach for recognising Indigenous self-autonomy and where non-Islanders issues are addressed collectively from a political point of view. Holistically, it means that Torres Strait affairs are managed accordingly by the people living in Torres Strait as proposed in the report made by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in 1997. Local Indigenous autonomy becomes merely a concept for coexistence. The facts to my argument are supported by and evident in the following speech, when Torres Strait representatives attended the Treaty Conference in Canberra in October 2002. At this conference, the Torres Strait Islanders’ agenda for self-determination is no longer a debate according to the past TSRA Chairperson, Mr. Terry Waia. In his article to the local newspaper, he wrote:

Let’s move away from thinking that we have to be a nation as such to be equal with other peoples. Sovereignty or independence doesn’t start with governments system and flags, it starts with each and everyone of us as individuals, because if we can control our own life, then we have a fundamental level of freedom that nobody can ever take away from us – that is

who we are. As Torres Strait Islanders we are proud of our identity and we are proud to be Australians, and we appreciate and conscious of the level of sovereignty that we have achieved, of course acknowledging that there is more to be done for Torres Strait...The challenge for modern Torres Strait leaders is to define a level of realistic sovereignty that our people want and that we can achieve (*Torres News* 30 August – 5 September 2002).

Islanders' push for self-determination has now become the objective for coexistence with all people of Torres Strait. The report acknowledged traditional Islanders as a people who have a strong connection to Torres Strait who have a unique cultural history developed through time as Ailan Kustom. The report took into account the 600 Aborigines who are the traditional inhabitants south of Torres Strait, the transient Papuan nationals (a treaty people with Australia, who were once the Islander's key trading partners to the north), and others, the non- Islander residents in Torres Strait (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 1997). A statement made by the then TSRA Chairperson, Mr. Waia in 2000 to the Cairns regional newspaper is at odds with other Islanders who share alternative dreams as to how they interpret autonomy:

Torres Strait regional Authority chairperson Terry Waia says the Torres Strait will never be independent from the rest of Australia. Mr. Waia, who was only recently named chairman of the body, said while moves towards autonomy already were under way, it would be foolish to believe the Torres Strait could ever stand alone. Mr. Waia said the 2001 target for autonomy had become a daydream. "We need to explain to the people there will never, ever be a time when Torres Strait will be isolated from Australia," he said. "I don't think that can never happen. We have community rights and some regional autonomy, but we will still be part of Australia ... I think there is still some uncertainty ... The people don't know where to turn and what to do ... So many people thought it was going to happen, but now, no one in their mind would believe that" (Cited in *Cairns Post*, Tuesday 9 May 2000).

The Standing Committees' report (ibid) on the autonomy, portrays the region of Torres Strait as multicultural, a melting pot of different backgrounds and cultures. They are Australian citizens and have equal rights to be a part of a greater regional autonomy, based on residency rather than on cultural difference. The non-Islanders, who are included in the autonomy process, have the capacity to expand their status of self-sufficiency, without being accountable to the State. In opposition to this, the predicaments of Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines remain unchanged.

Managing a Greater Autonomy and Torres Strait Islanders

The 1997 report submitted by the Parliamentary Committee on Standing Affairs made twenty-five recommendations for the Torres Strait region. Parts of the recommendations deserve quoting because of the clarity of the issues being raised. These recommendations provide the reader with a structural insight into proposals for the making of a nation state:

Recommendation 1:

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government negotiate the establishment of a joint statutory agency (the Torres Strait Regional Assembly) with the Queensland Government to represent all residents of the Torres Strait area and to replace the Island Coordinating Council; the Torres Strait Regional Authority and the Torres Shire Council;

Recommendation 2:

The Committee recommends that the proposed Torres Strait Regional Assembly consist of one representative elected from each Torres Strait Island Council electorate; three representatives elected from Thursday Island and two representatives elected from the residents of Horn and Prince of Wales Islands. All qualified voters should be eligible to be elected to the Regional Assembly, including those also running for office on island councils. Elections for the Regional Assembly should hold at the same time as island council elections;

Recommendation 3:

The Committee recommends that the statutory functions of the proposed Torres Strait regional Assembly be to; formulate policy and implement programs for the benefit of all people living in the Torres Strait area; accept grants, gifts and bequest made to it; act as trustees of money and other property vested in it on trust and accept loans of money from both the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments, or other approved sources; expend monies in accordance with the terms and conditions on which the money is received; develop policy proposals to meet national, state and regional needs of people living in the Torres Strait area; advise the responsible Commonwealth and Queensland Ministers on matters relating to the Torres Strait area, including the administration of legislation and the coordination of the activities of all government bodies that affect people living in the Torres Strait area; undertake activities on behalf of one or more island councils for such purposes as are requested of it by the council or councils concerned; have power to delegate to and contract with Island Councils; establish and operate such businesses as the Regional Assembly thinks fit for the benefit of the people of the region; and have and discharge the functions of local government within the region, except in areas covered by the Community Services (Torres Strait) Act 1984 (Qld) and the Community Services (Aborigines) Act 1984 (Qld). The final description and detail of these functions is to be negotiated by the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments and the people of the Torres Strait area;

Recommendation 10:

The Committee recommends that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission allocate at least 2.7% of the additional \$15 million funding provided to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander portfolio in the 1997-98 budget to the Torres Strait Regional Authority. Such an allocation should be continued for the period of the fixed term funding agreement. When the Torres Strait Regional Assembly, as described by the Committee is established, then the above funds should be allocated to the Assembly for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal specific purposes, particular to help achieve more effective employment training and health care programs;

Recommendation 12:

The Committee recommends that the Torres Strait Regional Authority allocate a proportion of the additional funding detailed in Recommendation 10 above to allow the Torres Strait Island Fisheries Training Project to commence. The Torres Strait Regional Authority (and later the Torres Strait Regional Assembly) should investigate the possibility of establishing joint ventures to ensure that the three prawn fishing license allocated to Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal inhabitants of the Torres Strait can be used to the benefit of these people;

Recommendation 13:

The Committee recommends that the Torres Strait Regional Authority develop generic guidelines for negotiation with people of the Torres Strait region that can be used by Commonwealth and State agencies which are developing policies that particular affect the region. Until the Regional Assembly is established, the above task should be conducted by the Torres Strait Regional Authority, in conjunction with the Island Coordinating Council (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 1997).

The recommendations support a Western method of administrative control in contrast to traditional methods of how Torres Strait Islanders had managed their autonomy to sustain continued occupation of their Islands which Beckett (1987), Lawrence (1991), Sharp (1993) and others have mentioned. From abroad in Salisbury's (1986) study of local determination for the Cree Nation in Northern Canada, there are examples of coexistence and its associated problems:

It is a change which holds one key to the successful economic and social development of many of the outlying areas of Canada. Studies of particular villages of the era after 1950 have consistently focused on the conflict within villages between those elements which show some continuity with traditional life, and those elements that have been brought in recently and are mainly the concern of intrusive whites. Each village has been the arena in which natives and whites play out a duel that the native people are doomed to lose, with the prizes being the benefits that come from the resources-powerful Canadian government. (1986, p. 8)

In contrast to Salisbury's interpretation, Torres Strait Islanders are a specific cultural group under the Queensland government's *Community Services (Torres Strait) Act* that governs the Torres Strait Islands for Torres Strait Islanders. The Act does not acknowledge traditional landowners as possessors of their inherited lands. In the Commonwealth's Standing Committee report for a Regional Assembly, it recommends support for and positioned the existent services along with the importance of government's agencies to remain in Torres Strait. Administratively, the established services and agencies is to support the purpose of a Regional Assembly and, to implement policies and planning as directed by a multifaceted board of Torres Strait politicians elected to run a new parliamentary assembly as directed:

The powers and operations of the regional assembly are then considered. Maximum community involvement in the assembly will ensure the people have greater autonomy than they presently enjoy. The Committee believes the assembly should conduct its business in public with a parliamentary style of organisation" (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 1997).

The report took into consideration the Islanders' social disadvantages when recommending a greater involvement of Indigenous participation in government services for employment and training as a mean to gain or require the necessary skills to administer local affairs in regional planning. In the Islands, the Community Development Employment Programs (CDEP) has been the main alternative to full time employment and commercial development. Most Islander residents (except pensioners) are partially employed as CDEP workers on various communities based programs or receive CDEP as a top-up on trainee wages to compensate the numerous training programs in existing services. The CDEP was first set up by the Commonwealth in 1977 according to Arthur (1991, p. 25):

In remote areas, where employment opportunities are few or non-existent, the CDEP scheme is a principal component of the AEDP [Aboriginal Employment Development Policy]. In this scheme, the equivalent of residents' unemployment benefits entitlements is paid as a lump sum to their community councils, along with a two part subsidy, the purpose of which is to cover administration costs and to enable councils to purchase some project materials. The council then organise work for their residents who are paid a weekly wage that should at least match their unemployment benefit entitlements

This acted as a trade off from community members receiving unemployment benefits

or ‘sit-down money’ (in Aboriginal terms) for CDEP. The CDEP was later introduced into the Torres Strait Islander communities and Arthur notes that “the CDEP scheme is significant in the Torres Strait region where in 1987 it contributed approximately \$7 to \$8 million dollars to the income of an estimated 700 Islander participants”. According to Arthur (1991, pp. 26-27), the first comprehensive investigation of the socioeconomic and political status of Torres Strait Islanders was carried out by Fisk from the Research School of Pacific Studies, of the ANU (Australian National University) when Torres Strait Islanders in the early 1988 made their move for political independence and that:

Following the stated objectives of the Commonwealth Government’s AEDP, launched in the 1986-87, as well as those of the Island Coordinating Council, a goal of the research and planning during 1989 and 1990 has been to increase Islander incomes and reduce dependency on government funding

Addressing the socioeconomic and political position of the Torres Strait Islanders has highlighted key problems for people living in remote areas such as in the Torres Strait with no secondary industry. Arthur (1991, p. 36) notes, “there a limits to household incomes which can be generated from the market economy” and explains that “the economic structure of remote areas inhabited by Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders imposes a limit on the number [participants] who can achieve the income and employment equity which are central goals of AEDP” using CDEP. In his follow up analysis of economic development programs, the fishing industry and Torres Strait Islanders in 2005, Arthur states that “CDEP is administered at a regional level by a particular body and in Torres Strait this is the TSRA”. To gain access to CDEP funds, “the (Island) Community Councils apply to the TSRA for funds and then administer these at the community level” and “The community organises its CDEP workers and is a de facto employer” (Arthur, 2005, p. 11). He explains that community prepares project plans and:

These [projects] may be associated with fishing, but at a level other than the self-employed fisher. Such project might be associated with a community freezer and might draw CDEP funds for its construction, or for training or management ...The CDEP is a transfer of government funds that can, at one level, viewed as perpetuating welfare dependency. However, in Torres Strait it is also a form of income support and as such it effectively reduces pressure on the fishery and so makes the industry more sustainable. The CDEP may also be used for elements of training and for construction associated with fishing. (Arthur, 2005, pp. 11 – 12)

Setting aside the Islanders’ socioeconomic differences from the wider Australian

society, Island leaders in pursuing their goal of greater autonomy in Torres Strait, have not achieved their first target of self-determination in 2001. In the following article (Figure 9), the prospects of a greater autonomy seem unlikely when other Island leaders have different thoughts how to achieve autonomy. The method proposed is through the United Nations Declaration on Decolonisation. This proposal has been severely criticised by others, in particular, Ken Dun from Kubin Village on Moa Island. This letter to the Editor of the *Torres News* is highly informative of the issues facing Torres Strait Islanders today. It should be read alongside the voice of the TSRA Chairperson Mr. Terry Waia, “I think there is still some amount of uncertainty ... The people don’t know where to turn and what to do” (ibid).

Whatever the intentions of Island leaders to lead my people towards self-determination through autonomy or the decolonisation process, such complicated matters require the input of constitutional experts and the full support of both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents in Torres Strait. In the past, the call for self-determination has characterised the selection of historical struggles and political reasoning of Indigenous Torres Strait Islanders for more than thirty years. However, Island leaders today in Torres Strait have sought autonomy for those who live in Torres Strait and have disregarded their fellow Islanders on the mainland, most of whom are traditional land holders, according to Islander tradition. As a matter of interest, since the official announcement for an autonomous Torres Strait in 1997, government spending has increased bringing in major infrastructure programs as fiscal investments (see Figures 4 and 5). This complements the initiatives of Islander representatives to work with governments for the betterment of Torres Strait affairs (ibid). At the local level, fiscal support has enhanced the local employment prospects of Islanders through education and training programs by partnership schemes between business enterprise and the local Island Councils, where CDEP is utilised as a substitute for Islanders receiving wages. From an economic perspective, Islanders’ predicament in gaining self-determination is difficult because of their dependency and reliance on government programs, local services and enterprise projects that are government owned (State and Commonwealth) and utilised by the local councils as community development projects. Government programs for rapid development have captured the majority of employment and training programs on the Islands and produced a local work force with an increased dependency on social welfare-

orientated services.

Figure 9. The Disapproval of Ken Dun - 'Decolonisation' not the way to go'

20 - 26 June, 2003

... Letters to The Editor ... Letters to The Editor ... Letters to The Editor ...

'Decolonisation' not the way to go

I was very interested to read Kevin Savage's letter on "Self-determination for Torres Strait" (*Torres News*, 13 June) and his invitation for comment.

Mr Savage urges Indigenous Torres Strait Islanders to think about what is best for the future of Torres Strait and its families and children and argues that "decolonisation" is the pathway to a better future.

I would like to make the case that decolonisation is not the way to go in today's struggle for greater autonomy.

In 1978 and 1979 this path was taken by the Torres United Party (T.U.P.). Its submissions to the United Nations Special Committee of Twenty Four on Decolonisation founded in 1981 after the Australian High Court rejected the T.U.P.'s claim that the 1879 annexation of the islands of Torres Strait to Queensland (and their subsequent incorporation within the Commonwealth of Australia) was illegal.

Perhaps more to point is the that the United Nation's Resolution 1514 (XV) containing the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (1960) referred to the United Nations Trust Territories and Non-Self-Governing Territories mentioned in Chapters XI and XII of its 1945 Charter.

New territories have not been added since 1945, although the status of New Caledonia was changed in 1986. In fact, the numbers have diminished so that in 1994 the Trusteeship System was wound up, having completed its historic task. Today, there are 16 non-self-governing territories remaining.

Mr Savage writes, "Most of these (remaining) territories are small island nations that are similar to our own islands". This is patently not the case. Six of the 15 Island territories have no Indigenous history, being uninhabited at the time of European colonisation.

These are Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, St. Helena, Turks and Caicos Islands and Pitcairn. Of the others, New Caledonia, Guam, United States Virgin Islands, American Samoa and British Virgin Islands have significantly larger populations than the Torres Strait. For example, New Caledonia has a population of more than 215,000.

The fact that Torres Strait has been part of Queensland since 1879 and part of Australia since 1901, and that the High Court of Australia has upheld this point, makes Mr Savage's arguments that decolonisation is the way forward difficult to sustain.

Torres Strait Islanders today are full citizens of Australia with the same access to the democratic processes of government as other Australians. A United Nations Declaration that refers to a process for achieving 'self-government for colonized peoples at the end of World War II' has little to offer the Indigenous people of Torres Strait in 2003.

It is erroneous to claim that "the type of government that we have over us today is known as 'Integration with an Independent State", and that the "(Mabo) High Court judgement has clarified that the Torres Strait can be defined...as a non self-governing (colonial) territory."

When considering that most important and complex question of the future quality of lifestyle and environment for the Torres Strait Islands Indigenous peoples, as the movement for greater autonomy picks up momentum, we need to compare the Islanders' potential future as Australian citizens with a potential future as a non-self-governing territory just embarking on the track to self-determination (if indeed that were possible). Here it is constructive to look at the present day situation of some of the former United Nations Trust territories and non-self-governing territories that have taken the road suggested by Mr Savage.

If we think of a strong economy as crucial to maintaining living standards and environment, what is happening to our Pacific neighbours? How many Torres Strait Islanders look with envy at the lifestyle in the western province of our nearest neighbour Papua New Guinea, a country that achieved self-determination in 1975?

If we consider the economic indicator of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or the total volume of all goods and services produced within a country in a given year, Papua New Guinea has a gross domestic product (GDP) per head of just \$US489 whereas Australia has a GDP \$US21,000.

The GDP of some other former territories, now island states, include Solomon Islands (\$US574), Kiribati (\$US460), Western Samoa (\$US1409), Vanuatu (\$US 1095).

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), whose goal is to reduce poverty in Asia and the Pacific, lends to developing member countries. A list of former UN territories and Pacific neighbours which receive aid from the ADB include Cook Islands, Fiji Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Is this the future desired for the Torres Strait?

These are all nations who have followed the path to self-determination under the United Nations Declaration on Decolonisation. Many of these nations also depend on aid from the World Bank and countries such as Australia and New Zealand.

The question we must ask is whether these nations, having achieved political self-determination, are now victims of economic colonization. Are their children to be burdened with a debt to the outside world that can never be repaid?

In the past I have heard Torres Strait leaders refer to the Cook Islands as a model for Torres Strait self-determination. The Cook Islands, as a former United Nations Non-Self-Governing Territory, chose the status of "Free Association with an Independent State" (New Zealand) in 1965.

Today, apart from tourism, the economy of the Cook Outer Islands is largely a subsistence one. The country is heavily dependent on the New Zealand Government and the Asian Development Bank for aid assistance after having been almost bankrupted by hosting the 1992 Festival of Pacific Arts.

I would urge all Torres Strait Islanders to look carefully at supposed models of successful self-determination.

The same issue of *Torres News* that carried Mr Savage's letter also detailed the coming year's Queensland budget for projects in Torres Strait.

Other people could obviously provide detailed information about how much money is expended annually in the Torres Strait by state and federal governments; however a quick calculation from the report indicates more than \$13.5 million will be spent on infrastructure projects listed for the coming year.

This does not include education, health, housing or employment initiatives, but the education budget must be at least \$5.5 million alone. Somebody may be able to provide readers with the full details, as well as a summary of the value of production provided by Torres Strait to Queensland and Australia.

These are the facts which the people of Torres Strait need to have to provide a context for the debate around the movement for greater autonomy.

I believe that to focus on Decolonisation today as a context for Torres Strait self-determination is to be weighed down by the dead hand of the past. Overlooked by Mr Savage in his letter is a significant United Nations Draft Declaration and Forum which may provide a strong foundation for debate about the nature of greater autonomy.

This is the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the 1993 Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Last month the Second Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was held at United Nations headquarters in New York.

The Forum's work and the articles of the 1993 Draft Declaration may well provide a framework for progressing the debate on greater autonomy in Torres Strait.

Ken Dun
Kubin Village

TORRES NEWS 18

(*Torres News*, 2003: 18)

A Contemporary Culture of Inducements

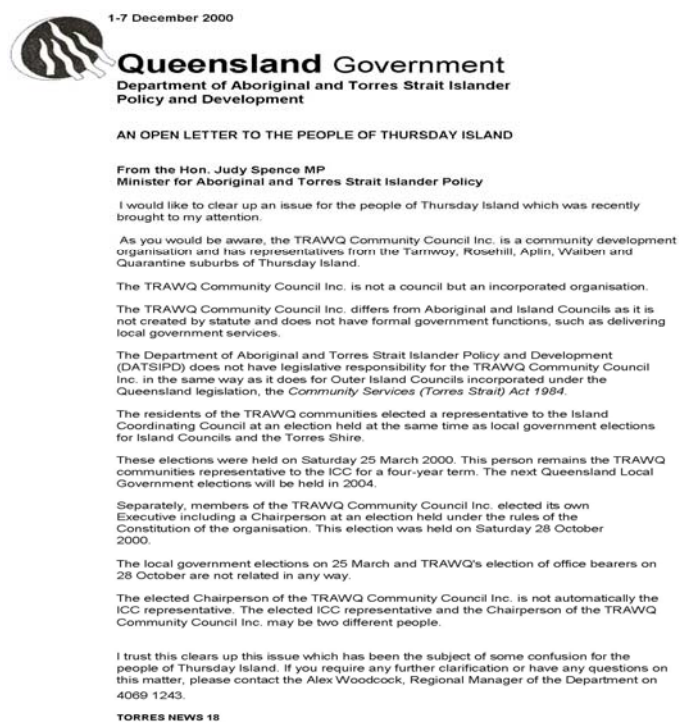
A modern Island state, requiring the mass injection of government funding into Island communities, could be the result of opportune advice and exchange between the Islands' representatives, governments and resource agencies. The Islanders' push for self-determination and political recognition has been Torres Strait Islanders' call of a proposed way of unshackling their link with welfareism. At the same time, the federal government has counteracted the proposal and while agreeing to the principles of establishing Torres Strait as a new state is proposed as a form of reconciliation for Torres Strait Islanders with the rest of Australia, they have not acted on it. There are other Islanders who have opted to keep alive the spirit of Torres Strait Islander's demands for self determination. The Torres Strait public was invited for input and have held a number of meetings on the issue chaired by the Greater Autonomy Steering Committee (GASC) composed of selected community leaders through community workshops. In response to the GASC invitation for public input, one member organisation of the TSRA and the ICC gave their interpretation of how they vision a greater autonomy in Torres Strait. This organisation, representing community groups from the suburbs of Tamwoy, Rose Hill, Aplin, Waiben, and Quarantine is incorporated as TRAWQ Community Council Inc. Based on Thursday Island¹⁸, TRAWQ presented a position paper listed here as Figure11. The input from TRAWQ saw autonomy as meeting the needs of Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people of the region. In 2002, the Queensland Government addressed the concerns of the people of Thursday Island and the legal entity of TRAWQ as a community based organisation (see Figure 10 on composition of TRAWQ).

The TRAWQ Proposal

TRAWQ's submission addressed the State and Commonwealth Governments' inadequate services to the region's services as having not improved the social and economic status of the Indigenous people. Their submission identified that Islanders and Aboriginal people continue to suffer ill health as they are not actively involved in

¹⁸ The TRAWQ Community Councils Incorporation is a community based organisation and is based on Thursday Island and represent Islander community groups in the suburbs of Waiben, Rose Hill, Aplin and Quarantine. It is part of the larger structure on the ICCs and TSRA.

Figure 10: Composition of TRAWQ



(*Torres News*, 1-7 December 2000, p.18)

social and economic development in Torres Strait. Community health was one of the main issues TRAWQ used to support the local desire for greater autonomy for Torres Strait Islanders. TRAWQ have envisaged that by having locally based community organisations involved in the 'New Deal' would provide opportunities for Torres Strait Islanders to demonstrate their creativity in determining, managing and delivering services and programs to their people. This organisation proposed that the development of regional and local government structures, encompassing government departments at State and Federal level within community-controlled organisations, is an important step in being accountable to the people of the region. The proposal divides the agencies into two: at the Regional Assembly a regional administration consisting of the Department of Community and Family Services, Department of Education, Training and Employment, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Enterprises and Economic Development, Department of Public Works, Department of Law and Order and the Department of Information and

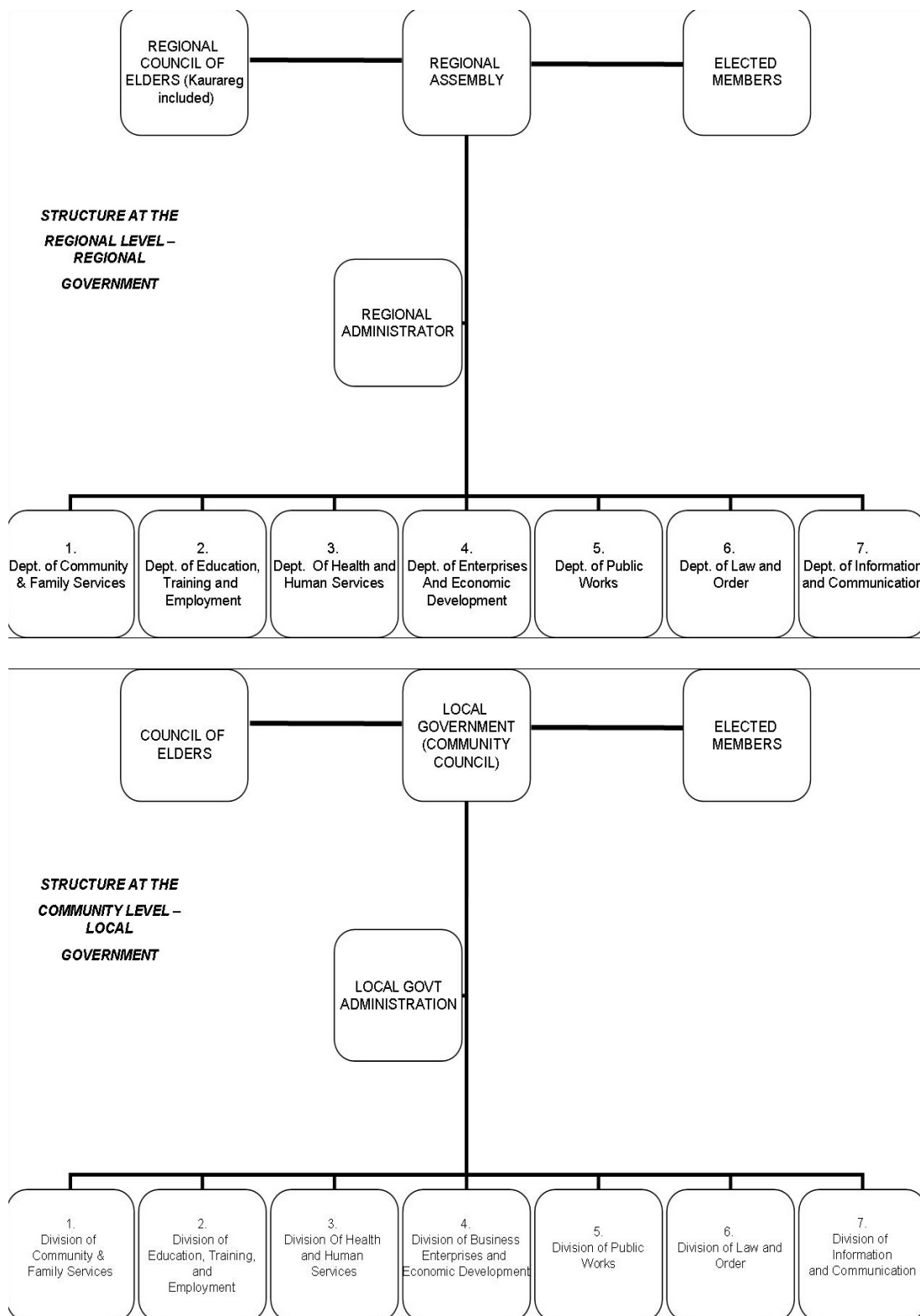
Communication, that are responsible to the Torres Strait Regional Assembly. At the community level, as local government, an administration consisting of the Division of Community and Family Services, Division of Education, Training and Employment, Division of Health and Human Services, Division of Business Enterprises and Economic Development, Division of Public Works, Division of Law and Order, and the Division of Information and Communication. TRAWQ argues that this framework was designed to identify key issues for government departments and community-controlled organisations without duplication of services and programs. It expects the Regional Assembly to formulate policies and to undertake operational planning and evaluation by supporting the local government administration in the management of service deliveries by community orientated initiatives as stated in their position paper, (see Figure 11).

Islander Self-Management or Institutionalised Control

The proposal by the Commonwealth Government for managing a “Greater Autonomy” for Torres Strait Islanders’ self-determination is conditioned by the mechanics of a colonial past. The proposed structure contains measures reflecting monitor and control when the Islands, formerly under the Protector for Aborigines in the 1930s and the Department of Native Affairs (DNA) in the 1950s administered Islanders’ affairs. Based on a concept of self-determination, the current proposal provides a more diverse view of Islander social status, their traditional connection to Torres Strait, and the implications of the Queensland government’s acquisition of Torres Strait Islands, since the Islands were annexed in 1879. Islanders’ traditional lands have changed status from ‘native reserves’ in the 1900s to become the Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) in the 1980s, leading the local people to a false believe of traditional ownership and control of their lands. The creation of DOGIT according to Sharp (1993, p. 218) related to “lands formerly reserved under the Torres Strait Islanders Act repealed in 1984. The two Acts – the *Community Services Act 1984* and the *Land Holding Act 1985* [of Queensland] – are complementary” for total control over the Islanders’ traditional property. Inevitably, Torres Strait Islanders without land security or control of their situation could not achieve self-determination. Islanders are also confronted with the recent enactment of the Commonwealth’s Native Title Act in 1994 with amendments to community title

Figure 11. TRAWQ Proposal:

A suggested model for the restructure of Government services under the structure of the proposed Torres Strait Regional Government.



TRAWQ Submission on Greater Autonomy, n.d

and co-existence. It gives Torres Strait Islanders a new significance for custom and traditions, and means that individual traditional ownership to lands in the Torres Strait does not exist as native title, because of the requirement for community titles under the Native Title Act. In this case, the political representatives, the elected arm of Islanders who are responsible for representing local affairs, have given the Island people an improvised security for self-determination upon their traditional lands. According to the Commonwealth, under the Native Title Act, native title lands are non-negotiable for real estate purposes or business transaction with wider Australia, “the Court said that native title cannot be brought or sold. It may be transferred according to traditional law and customs or surrendered to government” (Source: *National Native Title Tribunal* 2000 Newsletter).

Under this legislation, the Island Councils are aware that the Islands are Crown land held in trust for the local inhabitants, and by fulfilling their corporate duties, government owned houses and local infrastructures erected under Local Government By-Laws become State or Commonwealth’s properties. This situation has made the application of native title less than useful for many and has increased the numbers who have had questioned their rights as traditional landholders. One landowner on Murray Island seriously questioned his customary rights to his land inheritance in the Editor’s Column of the *Torres News* in 2002, contesting his native title rights. His complaints were against current developments on Mer (Murray Is) being carried out by the Mer Island Council: “there is no Native Title on Kiam, Murray Island, as far as this Bero family is concerned” (G. Bero 2001). This statement reflects on the particularities of Barnett on ‘knowledge and policy’ and takes into account the letter from the TRSA (Waia 2003) (See figure 12). Contrary to such a statement, it may be a conflict of interest for those representatives who hold positions in both the State and Commonwealth agencies and as local government Chairpersons on the Island Councils. As an Islander, the unique political situation of Torres Strait portrays conflicts of interest as ‘the man of many hats’ syndrome; Islander leaders talk of *Ailan Kustom* encompassing traditional heritage and culture and of *land belong Islanders* in Island Creole and politically, Islander leaders use the basic principle of *Ailan Kustom* in addressing social justice issues for their constituents, for external support, or in critique of governments’ policies.

Figure 12: A Letter from the Torres Strait Regional Authority



(Waia 2003, p. 9)

The above is an excellent example of the 'man of many hats' syndrome. In 2003, over native title rights in Torres Strait and government's ownership of infrastructure built on lands under native title, this matter became the subject of a major court dispute between the TSRA and Queensland Government. The Federal Court in Brisbane found that public works constructed or erected after the 23 December, 1996, High Court decision on the Wik case, did not extinguish native title and that prior to this date, public works on the Islands had extinguished native title. In

contrast to Island leadership opinion the TSRA Chairperson, Mr. Terry Waia said:

The decision has vindicated the Torres Strait's arguments that public works built after December 23, 1996, have not extinguished native title rights, its reassuring to know that infrastructure and housing built now, does not extinguish Native Title, but it's an enormous blow to traditional land owners whose homes were built prior to that date. In my opinion, any extinguishment of Native Title by public works on Torres Strait Islander people is unacceptable the TSRA, and the people of the Torres Strait will now be applying pressure on the Queensland Government to come up with a political solution that will result in full recognition of our Native Title rights. (*Torres News*, 17-23 October 2003, p. 10)

However the views of some Torres Strait Islander residents have recorded the opposite:

If this is the current state of play after six years of discussion about greater autonomy it is perhaps not surprising that the Torres Strait community at large is indifferent and apathetic about its potential to benefit future generations of Islanders. (K. Dun, *Torres News* 2003, p. 25)

These are local comments on the factional barriers that Torres Strait Islanders must overcome in demonstration of the representative roles of Island leaders which are displayed and or is not clearly defined to their constituents regarding how the representation process works.

Ailan Kustom: or a Divided Culture

In its present state, the tradition of "Ailan Kustom" is subverted by the contemporary role of a political representativity approach on majority decisions on Torres Strait issues. I reiterate that the approved Island politics are central to the region, where Island representatives use Islander's culture and social/economic disadvantage through the media for their political points scoring as Torres Strait Islanders' society becomes divided. The Islander group which resides in Torres Strait is the homeland Torres Strait Islanders, whose social development is currently maintained by the TSRA, the ICC and ICCs. Those Islanders on the mainland came under the ATSIC. ATSIC policies separate Islanders on the mainland from Islanders in Torres Strait and so isolate active protest by those Islanders who are politically active on the mainland and are aware of government policies towards Indigenous development.

The national government is aware that it was from the mainland that the push for Islander self-determination came together with other issues such as the recent native

title decision of *Mabo vs. Queensland* has been the political force for change. The proposal from governments at present is for a semi-autonomous control of Islander destiny. Overtly, the proposal for greater autonomy has placed most Islanders in an awkward position to ponder this. Irreversible change, common in the global situation of other Indigenous societies, is recognised here:

Viewing a social stationary process as the result of a quasistationary equilibrium, one may expect that any added force will change the level of the process. The idea of 'social habits' seems to imply that, in spite of the application of a force, the level of the social process will not change because of some type of 'inner resistance' to change. To over come this inner resistance, an additional force seems to be required, a force sufficient to 'break the habit', to 'unfreeze' the custom. (Etzioni & Etzioni-Halevy 1973, pp. 376 - 377)

At the local level, old habits often come into conflict with modern thoughts through the actions of those who respect tradition. It comes from those whose basic principle of protest often comprised of Ailan Kustom, traditional religion, clan groups and the kinship system or what is left of the Aboriginal and Islander culture in the region of Torres Strait. Recorded in the local paper, the Kaurareg people, Aboriginal descendants of lands south of Torres Strait protested their rights under the proposal:

To achieve success in any task we undertake that [it] is of a political, historical, social and spiritual nature, whether on a small scale or large, one must consider every angle holistically including people's rights, moral issues, political issues and spiritual issues. In particular, the social justice issues that affect our lives as human beings and as the traditional land owners of Kaiwalagal. We will never, never be free until we face up to the historic record, set it straight and get it right! Getting it right means honouring, upholding and joining in solidarity with those who have much to teach us about living in harmony with natural world, about working cooperatively for the good of all. (*Torres News*, 12-18 July 2002, pp. 6 - 8)

Alternatively, Island leaders have utilised a tradition of 'political representation' where arrangements with outside agencies have been strategically located at the forefront of culture and tradition. Islander political representatives have not thoroughly researched the meaning of autonomy, in particular Indigenous autonomy and the process for working with governments and others through cohabitation and coexistence.. The Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people of Torres Strait like others of the world's Indigenous peoples have changed to adapt to a contemporary way of life. The Torres Strait model for autonomy is a far cry in comparison to the Cree of Canada as (Salisbury 1986, p. 136) notes their local politics as a regional

society:

What are the ways in which Cree Society has really changed? In material goods, in wealth, in housing, in technology, the observable changes have been dramatic, through an observer of both periods would see real continuity in how people used the technology. He would consider these observable changes as superficial and as representing material change. Whether they indicate social change would be decided on other grounds... The change is a real and not a superficial one... It is undoubtedly a social change, insofar as the people operating society have changed... it more than merely a change of the people running a society whose *structure* has not changed? Indeed, the change in the structure of regional society is of a different kind from a change in the personnel of the society...the present links between villages and towns all existed at that time; that organisations like the airlines, the HBC, and DINA all carried out village activities that formed the part of a wider regional structure of relations between “branches” of each organisation in different villages and between the village branches and a regional “head office”

A Greater Self-Governance or a Social Concept for Disadvantage

The Commonwealth has proposed that Indigenous Islanders in the Strait should attain the same manner of living enjoyed by mainstream Australia and be formally recognised by governments and tha a ‘New Deal’ for Torres Strait Islanders is different from the past assimilation policies. The Commonwealth’s report recommended Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities should enjoy together the self-management of Torres Strait. My argument is about difference and Indigenous Torres Islanders and Aborigines in the region will not enjoy the full implications of a greater autonomy when they remain socially disadvantaged The Islanders’ independence will be controlled fiscally by the regional assembly that will “act as trustee of money and other properties vested in it on trust and accept loans of both Commonwealth and Queensland, or from other sources” (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 1997). In trying to explain their current economic situation it is evident that there has been massive government spending up to 1999 to develop Torres Strait and control Indigenous self- management. In time, Indigenous autonomy for Torres Strait will become a thing of the past as long as Torres Strait Islanders are not fully represented as the major stakeholders in the region.

Self-independence or self-determination through the processes of “representivity” is unattainable and will not be solved by time and borrowed money, as it requires a

more coordinated and active approach to address the social circumstances of Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines in the Torres Strait region. Such an approach has led to the continued dependence of Islander people. Indeed, this concept is paternalistic and bears little meaning for real self-determination. It would be misleading for me to generalise over the historical experience of Torres Strait Islanders of the past and present who contributed generously their part as labour and public servants with wider Australia in developments at a national level.

In the coming chapter, I examine the roles of Torres Strait Islanders together with others in developing this nation, Australia. Using literature and other sources to guide my arguments, I present an historical analysis of the involvement of Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines, with others, in the developmental history of Torres Strait. It make a case about the long historical struggles of Indigenous Torres Strait for recognition and the historical perceptions of outsiders, particularly regarding the total management of Islander affairs.

Chapter Four

Resources and Development – Elements of Social Change

This chapter examines the history of Torres Strait and the Islanders' adaptation to a global economy. Setting aside the local politics of the Islands and how they are administered by Island leaders, this chapter analyses the economic development of natural resources in Torres Strait and the making of Queensland. It makes the connection between the plight of Indigenous Islanders and the Islanders' colonial past. The chapter reflects on a history that has deprived traditional Islanders of economic opportunities where colonial policies obstructed Islanders from gaining a foothold in the developing global economy. In particular, the method of incorporating Islanders by colonial Queensland that extended its colonial boundaries through indirect means over Islander affairs and the economy opened Torres Strait to foreign capitalists who alienated Indigenous labour and resources.

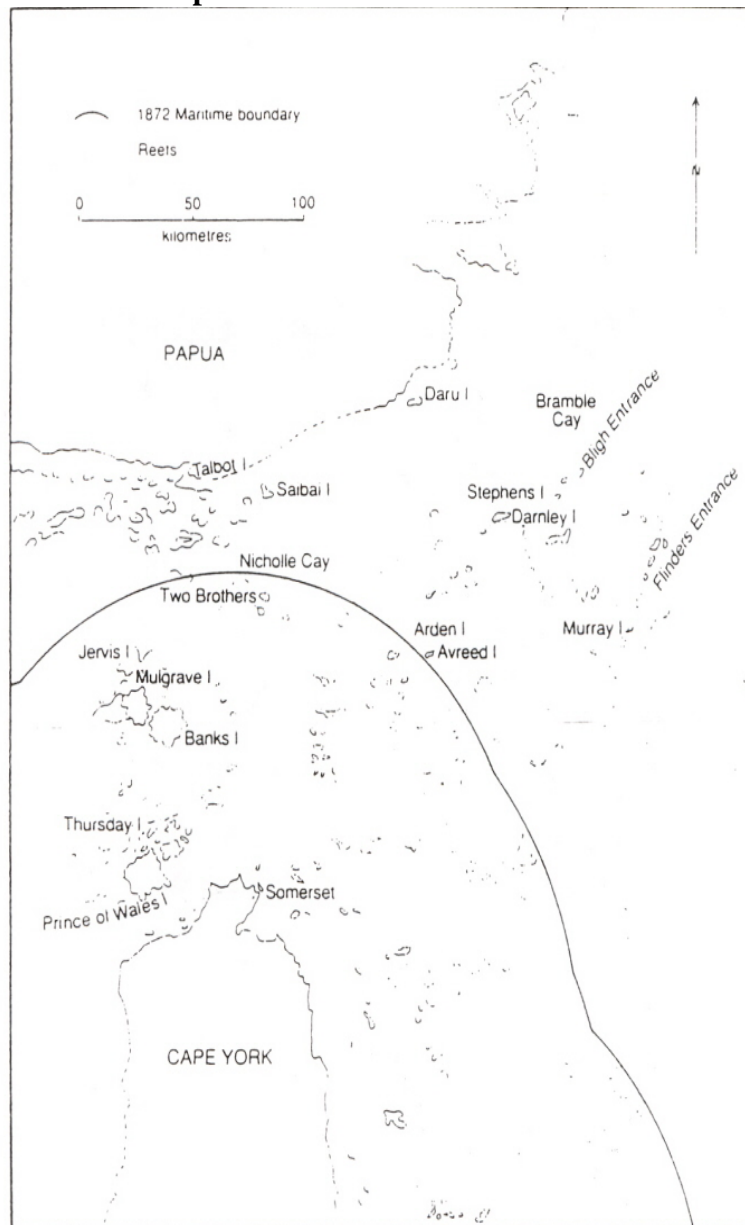
By examining this history from a “development” perspective, it is clear that the current economic prospects for social and culture change are limited. The colonial development of Torres Strait Islanders' society through colonial methods of economising has meant that Islanders today are unable to recognise how their past has shaped their future. The colonial methods complement separate notions of economy and societies as understood by LeClair and Schneider (1968, p. 238):

... Political action, for example, has been identified as a rational process of the attainment of ends through the acquisition and exercise of coercive power over individuals and groups. For while economic (adaptive) and political (goal attainment) action are defined in essentially the same way as before, they now assume an entirely new significance by being classed not merely as types of action, but as *functional* prerequisites of any and all social system.

In this chapter the political ends of governments are examined. In particular, the colonial concept of indirect rule and how it has dominated Islanders rights by a common external authority. This type of rule has acted to obstruct Islanders' advancement while significant cultural changes took place in their culture area. It is the intention here to make evident the underlying causes of social change since colonial Queensland first established an outpost at Somerset on Cape York, Australia in 1864 (Kaye 1997).

It contextualised a culture that was driven by imperial directives of “Empire building and trade, which in turn created grids of communication, which bound together different populations under the aegis of dominant religious or political ideologies” (Wolf 1982, p. 25). Although this thesis has its focus on Torres Strait Islanders, it is notable that both the coastal Aborigines of Cape York and Torres Strait Islanders of North Queensland were jointly targeted to participate in developing the marine economy of the colony.

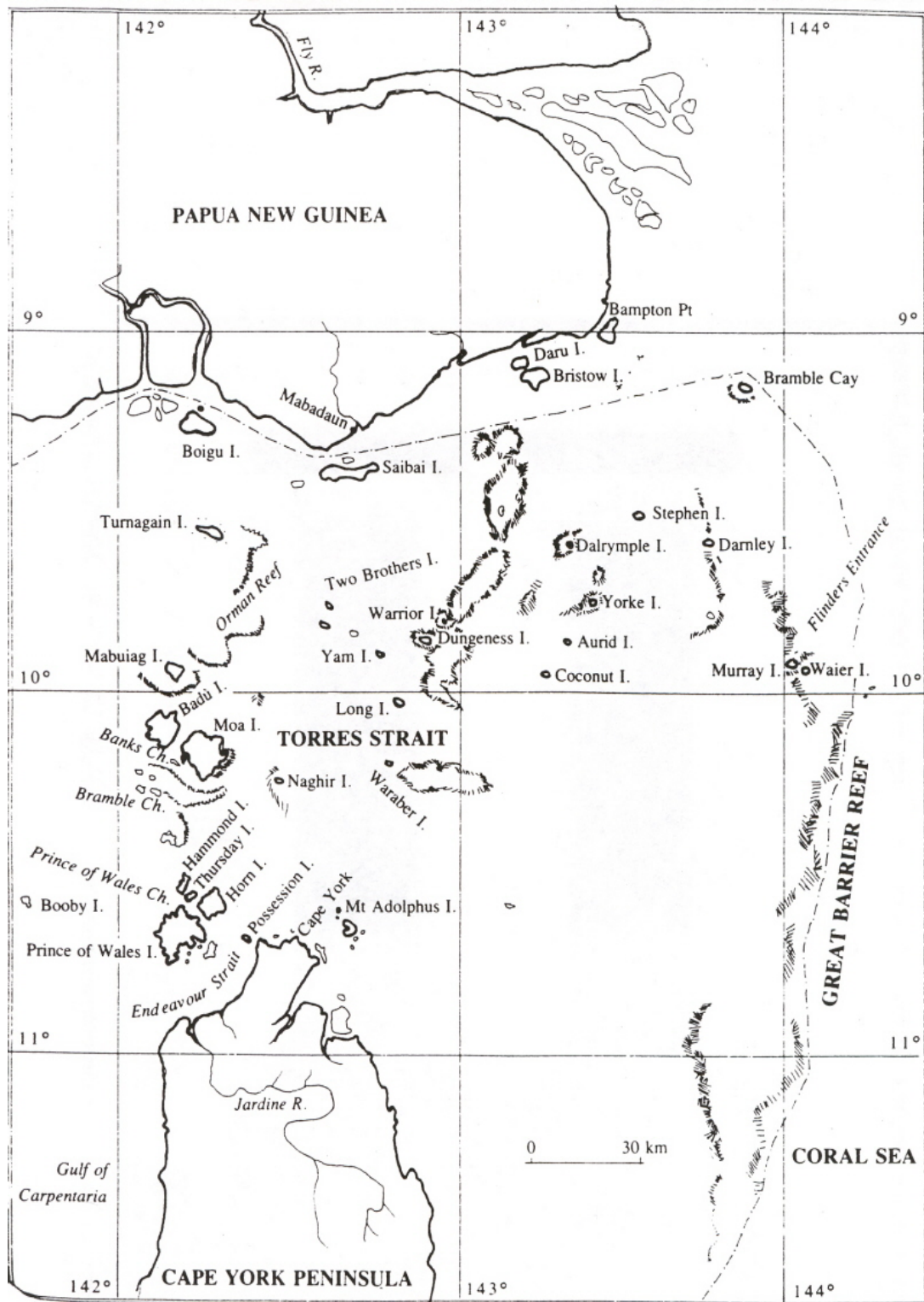
Figure 13: Mullins Map



Map 3. 1872 Queensland Maritime Boundary. (60 miles limit from the tip of Cape York extending north)

(Mullins 1994)

Figure 14 Finch Map



Map 1. Torres Strait Island showing 1879 Boundary. The extension of the Queensland border after annexation.

(Finch 1977)

In 1878, a politically motivated strategy between the two governments of the newly established colony of Queensland and the British Parliament extended the sixty miles maritime border of Queensland further north to encompass all the northern Islands of the Torres Strait, passing three miles off the southern coast of Papua New Guinea.

According to Kaye (1997, p. 37):

This was done by Letters Patent in 1878 and the area was accepted by Queensland the following year. The legal mechanisms used to bring about the annexation of the islands were complex and there was a time for concern about their legality. These concerns were addressed in the *Colonial Boundaries Act 1895* (Imp), which had the effect of confirming the validity of placing all the Torres Strait islands under Queensland sovereignty.

Prior to annexation, commercial mariners had already established their pearling and beche-de-mer bases on a number of Islands and had already exercised their influence on the local population being, for most part, accepted as part of the kin groups (Haddon 1935, Vol. 1, pp. 14 – 15). From a cultural perspective, this encouraged local groups to adopt new ways of judging between the value systems of their tradition and those of foreigners in the 1800s. It was a period of intensive contact between traditional Islanders and outside mariners rather than missionaries. At the onset of the marine trade, it was the Central and Western Islanders who were exposed to the lures of the manufactured European products that coaxed them into harvesting the seabed for pearl shells and beche-de-mer. The marine products, when processed, fetched excellent prices on the European and Asian markets and this in turn led to the expansion of the industry to other Islands of Torres Strait. However, the inconsistency of foreign economic relations and the values of goods imported into traditional Torres Strait led Islanders to adapt and readjust to these changes (Haddon, 1935, Vol. 1, p. 15). During this period, colonial authorities of Queensland had semi jurisdiction to supervise the industry. Traditional Islanders did well in this industry. As early as the mid-late 1800s, the concept of indirect rule was introduced by the officials using selected Islanders (Mamoose) to administer on their behalf and on behalf of the colonial government of Queensland. It remained until the Islands and its Islander population came under total administration in 1879. Barnett's (1956, p. 6) analysis suggests that:

Indirect rule, as evolved in West Africa, the Indies, Fiji, and elsewhere, is not essentially a device for securing information on native custom. Rather, it presupposes such knowledge. It endeavours to integrate native institutions, especially those pertaining to law and political control, into

European administrative machinery with the aim, as one proponent said, of gradually and painlessly grafting “our higher civilisation upon the soundly native stock . . . moulding it and establishing it into lines consonant with modern ideas and higher standards”. Thus, while the aim is development, the starting point is custom; and the authorities for custom are the participants themselves, commonly chiefs or other conspicuous embodiments of power. Such representatives of the people are, in effect, practicing informants or advisors.

In Torres Strait, government forced Islanders to accept such conditions and meant that Islander progress would be partial. This was particularly so after Islanders became involved in the industry (during the 1860s in particular) as the waters of Torres Strait began to become “the focal point for the Queensland pearling industry, which supported over 350 boats and 2500 people during its peak in 1904” (Torres Strait Fisheries Assessment Group 1999). The industry found a profitable market which encouraged the maximum harvesting of various marine commodities where the benefits from this export income contributed to the entrepreneurs and to the developing state of Queensland and not to the people of Torres Strait. Finch (1977) recorded that from 1872 to 1875 the number of boats engaged in pearling and beche-de-mer increased to 100 with 1000 men, mostly Torres Strait Islanders, employed and contributing to state revenues. Although Indigenous involvement was controlled, the Islanders worked to feed their families despite the paternalistic conditions which saw Islanders treated primarily as labour and provided no long term incentives for their ongoing contribution (see Figure 15).

A Regulated Economy

In the development of the pearl-shell industry, local knowledge and skills were the primary attributes that Islanders brought to the marine economy. Previously, local knowledge had contributed significantly to trade in traditional goods. This trade influenced the tradition and culture of Torres Strait Islanders as a seafaring society, where considerable planning was required to accommodate material goods in the widespread area of Torres Strait (Sharp, 1993, p. 28). Torres Strait Islanders’ involvement in a European based marine industry was not organised through a market pattern and Islanders’ maritime skills were a resource for entrepreneurs and colonial administrators. Islanders were controlled as a labour source and their welfare was administered accordingly. In the long term, the change in Islander lives was institutionalised through policies that have left Islanders caught in a welfare economy

Figure 15: Photos on the pearling industry in Torres Strait



Twenty miles north of the extreme tip of Cape York is Thursday Island, the centre of Queensland's pearl shell fisheries. Before the war the pearling fleet and shell collecting was manned almost entirely by Japanese; today the islanders of the adjacent Torres Straits group have become the backbone of the industry that is worth £500,000 to Australia. At the outbreak of war, every able-bodied islander joined the armed forces and they achieved a worthy record of war service. The end of the war left the islander more determined than ever that no alien should enter the pearling industry to deprive him of the rights and gains obtainable in that industry. Today the Torres Straits people own thirty-five luggers and cutters valued at £50,000, and the 1000 men of the pearling fleets are proving themselves capable and worthy of the trust reposed in them.

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(Hurley 1955, p.93).

with a history of failures instead of successes. On the pretext of being humanitarian towards Torres Strait Islanders, the then Premier of Queensland, John Douglas said:

I see no objection to the acceptance on the part of the government of the responsibilities, which this territorial rectification may involve. It does not at all follow that we should form settlements. (The Islands) ought to be visited occasionally by the Resident Magistrate at Thursday Island, but it would not be necessary to do more than this at present [or] increase our expenditure. (Cited in Mullins 1994, p. 142)

Administering the affairs of Torres Strait Islanders was not the first priority of colonial Queensland. According to Mullins (1994, pp. 134 - 140):

The commercial implications were apparent to them, but the principle economic consideration was the possible threat an unregulated Torres Strait pearling industry might pose to the supply of Pacific Islander plantation labour. The maritime trading colonies were more interested, but like Queensland they were reluctant to become directly involved, though this did not stop them from continuing to press the imperial government on the issue.

Thus, and contrary to Douglas's comments, when Queensland took control of the maritime industry, the state made its case to the British Government regarding its humane treatment of Torres Strait Islanders. The Queensland case was that in order to stop the abuses of foreign mariners, Queensland would regulate the Islanders' working conditions, including those who worked for outsiders in the beche-de-mer and pearling industry. The proposal disguised the colonial "expansion of state" over the whole of Torres Strait as a protectionist measure by introducing their system in a roundabout way to deny Islanders their traditional rights of occupation. The introduced system made Torres Strait Islanders less understanding of the new way, as their lands and local marine resources became the property of Queensland. Socially, for Torres Strait Islanders, the path to modernisation was not a passive transition as they adjusted from subsistence living to a marine commodity-based economy. Islanders were, "drawn from their subsistence activities by the lure of consumer goods... [when required and]...only to be forced back to these activities again" (Beckett 1987, p. 39). To assist in the process, those locals who were appointed as overseers of Islander affairs were encouraged to adopt a new way of leading their people. The engagement of locals as advisers from a global perspective constitutes a process through the accumulation of local knowledge: "Colonisation programs, if they have been dedicated to the destruction of the indigenous populations, have necessitated in knowledge of local custom" (Barnett, 1956, p. 2). However, for Torres Strait Islanders, working conditions under colonial masters in the new economy transformed the Islander culture from a culture grounded in sustainability

to a contemporary culture of needs and wants. In the 1930s, one Island, under the administration of the Protector for Aborigines is used here as an example, as cited by Beckett (1987, p. 147):

Badu was dedicated to hard work, the paramount good from which all other benefits flowed indeed the steady flow of official visitors bore witness to the fact that the Queensland government regarded Badu as its success story.

The outcome from a dedicated workforce accommodates the imposition of local advisers, Islander leaders who carry out their roles accordingly: “Often such individual exercise powerful controls over administrative decisions through their representation of the local situation” (Barnett, 1956, p. 3) with the intent of their charters. The ideology of a “success story” for Badu Islanders is contained within the principles of “indirect rule” and in Wolf’s assessment of globalisation, he notes:

Cultural change or cultural evolution does not operate on isolated societies but always on interconnected systems in which societies are variously linked within wider social fields, one of the utilities of the concept of the modes of production lies precisely in that it allows us to visualise intersystemic as well as intrasystemic relationships. (1982, pp. 73 -100)

According to Wolf, Marx generalised and developed the concept of a capitalist mode of production, “his [Marx’s] conviction and understanding of how modes of work provide the key to the understanding of others” (Wolf 1982, pp. 73 – 100). This interpretation reflects how colonial Queensland had imposed its control over Torres Strait Islanders. For the Torres Strait Islands, the capitalist mode of production enabled Colonial Queensland to exploit and impose on the labour of Torres Strait Islanders. This fits the global description offered by Wolf: “This specific capability is not an inherent attribute of wealth as such; it develops historically and requires the installation of certain prerequisites” (Wolf 1982, p. 73). In this study, the installation of certain prerequisites captures the notions of development, colonialism and Torres Strait Islanders. It is a history of colonisation and the colonised.

The Prerequisites of Colonial Rule

The installation of certain colonial prerequisites for Torres Strait Islanders under indirect rule, characterised the intentions of colonial Queensland as the “holder of wealth that is able to acquire the means of production and to deny access, except on their own terms, to all who wants to operate them” (Wolf 1982, p. 77). It reflects the

shift of policies made by the Queensland Government, when the *Pearl-Shell and Beche-De-Mer Act, 1897* was passed to regulate the fishery under its control. In the same year according to Singe, the government introduced the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts to prohibit cohabitation between Torres Strait Islanders, Pacific Islanders and outsiders. The Queensland Government had also enacted other legislation to prevent kidnapping (black birding):

On 27 June 1872 the “Kidnapping Act” passed by the British Parliament sought to regulate the controversial labour trade in the Pacific – not a small part of which was related to North Queensland and the Torres Strait that all British labour vessels apply for licenses and that they enter into a bond of five hundred pounds for the prevention of kidnapping and mistreatment of indigenous labour. (Singe 1989, p. 63)

These colonial laws did not specifically target Torres Strait Islanders; the legislation included the capitalist entrepreneurs and their contracted labour power (outsiders) to limit their exploitation of marine resources and locals. The outsiders included the Pacific Islanders, who since the 1860s through the pearl shell and beche-de-mer fishery had a long association with Torres Strait Islanders. These outsiders were the contracted labour (victims of colonialism a century earlier in their own lands) who brought with them new ideas that would be contradictory to the official administration of the Islands. The Islanders’ relationships with these two groups and others (European and Asians) were a turning point. Shnukal’s (1992) study of relationship between Torres Strait Islanders and outsiders, in particular with Pacific Islanders, whose cultural influence did not displace Islanders from their homelands, concluded that:

Torres Strait history is unique in Australia in that, while Europeans established the overarching commercial, legislative, political, religious and educational institutions, daily life in the new order were mediated primarily by Pacific Islander settlers. Significant contact events in the Strait cannot be explained solely ‘from above’, i.e. with reference to contemporary European actions; they need to be understood also ‘from below’ in terms of island politics, families’ alliances and land ownership. Torres Strait Islanders’ perceptions of Pacific Islander custom’ influenced almost every aspect of their traditional life for the past two contact generations, a time of previously unimaginable life ways choice and technological change. (1992, p. 52)

The ongoing strategy of legislating for Torres Strait meant differentiation between the precapitalist mercantile wealth and capitalism through development in relation to the socioeconomic situation of Torres Strait Islanders. When colonial intentions are addressed from a global perspective:

Historically and developmentally, money-begetting money turned into capital when it assumes a function of capital in production in changing its function, money as capital accomplished what money-begetting money had been able to achieve; the capacity to affect and regulate the quantity and quality of social labour embodied commodities. (Wolf, 1982, p. 305)

Economically, the operation of a pearling industry requires manual operators, a major cost item at a time when European divers refused to be engaged on lower-wages for dangerous working conditions. The alternative was to replace Europeans with Torres Strait Islanders to work besides others who were indentured to the marine industry. Such a move by colonial administrators and pearling masters was taken because they: “could pay them less than foreigners and Aborigines and Papuans less than Islanders” (Beckett, 1987, pp. 38-39). This was supported by the Kidnapping Act of 1872 that legislated to stop further importation of indentured coloured labour from the Pacific regions and so meant that Torres Strait Islanders were readily available. Although Islanders were severely economically disadvantaged, their involvement in the industry maximised their sea skills within the modern methods of working in a pearling industry and for an industry with a labour shortage: “the ideal labour force consisted of a mixture of local and foreign workers.” (Beckett, 1987, pp. 38 – 39) Although Torres Strait Islanders were conditioned to work under the rules of legislation, their working relationship with others exposed them to the cultures of the global community through adopting new ways.

‘Ailan Kastom’ a Culture Reconstructed

In her study of Torres Strait Islanders and cultural reconstruction, Shnukal (1992: 52) researched fifty years of conflicting colonial ideologies and Islanders’ involvement with other cultural groups that created “*Ailan Kastom*”. Shnukal focused her research on Pacific Islanders who arrived in Torres Strait in the 1800s as contracted seamen for the marine industry. Shnukal found that the mixed cultural group from the Pacific occupied a position quite different from Torres Strait Islanders. Indentured to the pearling and beche-de-mer industry, Pacific Islanders were accorded privileges and entrepreneurial opportunities that were denied Torres Strait Islanders. According to Beckett (1987, p. 36), “The first crop of skippers came from Loyalty Islands, Rotumah, Samoa, and Nuie” and held positions of responsibilities in the marine industry. Later, “the masters imported labour, often already experienced

in the work, from Malaya, the Philippines” and Japanese in 1890 who “Undercut and outworked everyone else, requiring special legislation to stop them taking over the industry.” Shnukal (1992, p. 52), describes Pacific Islanders as cultural middleman. Sharp (1993, p. 7) wrote, “the South Sea Islanders who began to arrive in the Torres Strait Islands from 1850s onwards, were a critical influence in the development of intercultural reciprocity-symbolic exchange and intermarriage with indigenous Islanders”. This contact with Torres Strait Islanders was strongest over a period of forty years (1860 – 1900). This gave Torres Strait Islanders the opportunist interrelationship with other cultural groups through their daily interactions as marine labour and social connections through the numerous intermarriages that gave the traditional people a greater exposure to the world at large.

In the 1900s new laws were passed in particular, those made to target imported labour from the Solomon Islands: “The new Commonwealth Government legislated that all recruiting of Kanakas must cease by 1904 and that all Kanaka labour must be repatriated home after 1906” (Cohen & Black, p. 178). The adoption of the White Australia policy resulted in the deportation of a number of indentured Pacific Islanders from the sugarcane fields of Queensland and the pearling beds of Torres Strait. The deportation orders disrupted Torres Strait, and the presence of those indentured Islanders who remained in the Torres Strait was conditional (exempted to be classed as Indigenous Torres Strait Islanders). These included those legally married to local Island women who had to accept the conditions of the Protector for Aborigines of the 1900s. Those Pacific Islanders who were married to local women, did little to diminish the family ties already made and: “In every case the women [Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander] have declared their desire for the official marriage, and also their readiness to accompany their respective husbands to their island homes” (Annual Report of the Northern Protector of Aborigines for 1903, pp. 14 – 15). Those who were permitted to remain retained their identities as Pacific Islanders, and other nationalities from outside Torres Strait. The cohabitation of Torres Strait people with outsiders was a strain on the coloniser/colonised relationship. According to Mullins:

The great grievance and thorn [for the masters] is the South Sea Islander who will not remain the heathen Polynee that he was, but keeps pace with the time, and is already becoming too civilised and knowing to give twelve months service for Butcher’s knife, a nine penny tomahawk, and a dab of red ochre

quarterly on each cheek, as was the case in the old time, but has already learned the love of money, is a good judge of Queensland rum, and uses a toothbrush (1990, p. 157).

Although the Pacific Islanders protested for their rights before the colonial authorities, as indentured workers, Mullins notes that those who commanded the greater authority over Torres Strait Islanders were the “administrators, traders, and missionaries who succeeded in establishing a colonial order in the Strait” who were the authoritarian agents of change:

The new cultural order came about by a process that had a logic of its own. Pacific Islanders were no more the passive agents of colonial order than Torres Strait Islanders were its simple, uncomprehending victims. For the most part Torres Strait Islanders confronted them, and the Pacific Islanders were intent on creating an order of their own, one that was familiar to, and convenient for themselves. (1990, p. 157).

From a cultural perspective, Torres Strait Islander families from past intermarriages between Torres Strait Islanders with Pacific Islanders, Malays, and other nationalities became families that acknowledged their cultural roots and connections according to Ailan Kustom. One part of the new custom, according to Haddon (1908) was that Torres Strait Islanders shared the privilege of belonging to a new social group where “marriages is looked at a point of business with native parent consents, where money and goods are exchanged in reciprocal as the Islanders were long used to the value of money by social and economic contact” (Haddon 1908, p. 115). Beckett says: “Every island was affected by the incursion of foreign seamen, seeking wives and ready to offer trades goods by way of bride price ...parents were inclined to favour foreign sons-in-law on this account” (1987, p. 38).

Living independently for Torres Strait Islander families was not aligned with colonial policies as indicated in the comments of Chief Protector Bleakley for Aboriginal Protection: “The Islanders have not yet reached the stage where they are competent to think and provide for themselves; they are really overgrown children, and can best be managed for their own welfare, as a parent would discipline his family.” (Cited in Beckett, 1987: 49) Traditional Island women who had marital relationships with Pacific Islanders, Asians and Europeans before the 1930s were married by Pacific Island preachers of the London Missionary Society (the LMS) who were stationed on most of the Torres Strait Islands. Such family groups experienced a lifestyle in a changed cultural environment. Most of the intermarriages had a distinct social status

amongst kin-group, and were later classed as half-caste in colonial terms. Haddon's assessment of the family social and kinship system in the Western Islands was that:

Marriages with members of other races have only occurred the last thirty years [on Mabuiag]. Fifty five marriages are recorded in the genealogies, of which 32 were with Melanesians, eight with Polynesians and eight with Malay, while three were with South Sea people [who were connected] with the pearling and beche-de-mer industries. (904, Vol. V, p. 235)

Leading into the 1900s, deportation orders were pending for those of outsiders' descent and, according to Haddon, many of the marriages were temporary and were dissolved when husbands were removed by order of repatriation. Those who agreed to remain with their Island wives were resettled in 1904 to the St Paul's Anglican mission station on Moa Island (Banks Is). They came not only from the Island of Mabuiag, but from other Islands around Torres Strait (Burchill 1972). The removal of such marriages from traditional settings is one method of prohibiting the spread of external influences amongst the people. Church missions of other denominations were specifically established to administer the welfare of these families who were not classed as either Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal. In 1929, the other cultural group of Asian descent developed their own mission station on Hammond Island (Kiriri) which was administered by the Roman Catholic Church. Eight years before in 1921, the Protector for Aborigines removed the traditional inhabitants from Hammond Island to distant Moa Island, away from the reaches of outsiders' habits and influences on Thursday Island. This made way for the new Catholic Mission. This incident relates to previous colonial conditions identified by Sharp (1993, p. 138) as "a time when 'the old time dispersals' were being replaced by the 'protection' (QPP 1905, p. 23)." According to Stone (1974, p. 133) it was the twentieth century new deal for Aborigines (and Indigenous Torres Strait Islanders) that:

For many years, the dominant theme behind official policy has been to protect all Aborigines in their declining years from the degrading influence of white and Asiatic culture. Accordingly, inviolable reserves had been created in the remote parts of the different states. ... In 1928 Queensland Chief Protector Bleakly emphasized the importance of educating part Aborigines and isolating them from their dark skinned relative'.

This class system under the exemption policy had severely affected the social relationship of many Indigenous families, not only in Torres Strait but across Australia. Despite these paternalistic conditions, the traditional ways of doing things, the Islander way, became Ailan Kastom and has taken on a particular form:

Like the *costumbre* of the Meso-American Indians and much of the *kastom* of the Pacific Islands, island custom is traditional primarily in the sense of being distinctive to a stable, long established, closely knit and self-conscious society. (Beckett, 1987, p. 4)

Ailan Kastom, which traditional Torres Strait had adopted into their lifestyle, exhibited the new way of doing things. It had progressed from cohabiting with other cultures and most effectively, the adoption of European traits through resource development. It is within this context that I locate my account of how the culture and resource of Torres Strait became political objects for contestation through development. The following section is about some of the aspects that affected Torres Strait Islanders mobility throughout the commercial activities of the pearling and beche-de-mer years. Years of political seclusion meant that Torres Strait Islanders inherited no serious benefits since the time their forefathers first became involved in a European market economy by working under institutionalised conditions. From my perspective, I view Islanders' involvement in the marine industry as them being treated as though they were merely a resource in time and space, useful for labour and production.

The Colonial Method of Supervising a Regulated Island Economy

In 1877, Henry Chester, the colonial official of Somerset on Cape York, was promoted to Police Magistrate in a strategy that seems to be politically motivated to regulate and align the marine economy to colonial standards. The move also led to the dismantling of the colonial outpost at Somerset for a more favourable centralised location at Port Kennedy (Thursday Is), south of Torres Strait. In her ethnography, Burchill writes of the maritime industry when administered from Port Kennedy (now know as Thursday Island): “A vigorous pearl shell industry developed, tons of first class shells were exported to the mainland and overseas” (1972, p. 6).

During its development, Torres Strait Islanders were to remain as protected wards of Queensland under the protectionist measures passed in the late 1800s to remove most outsiders and their influence from the Islands. The expulsion of most outsiders and their influence from the Islands meant the Islands' inhabitants were open for colonial exploitation as interpreted in the report of Henry Chester. In his 1871 report, Henry Chester as Police Magistrate supervising and policing pearlers and beche-de-mer operators who held leases on Islands for their marine operations notes his barter with

the Western Islanders for pearl shells, in particular, with the people of Mabuiag (Jervis Is). He noted that they were not in a position to comprehend the commercial exchange rate for pearl shells in monetary terms:

An interpreter from Cape York explained to them the reason of our visit and warned them that not more than one canoe would be allowed alongside at a time. With some little difficulty, due to the stupidity of the interpreter, they were made to understand that the price of a tomahawk of small was 10 pair of shells; of a large knife, 15 pair; while three (pearl shells) would purchase a fig of tobacco, and five pair, a piece of iron for a fish spear ... Neither then, nor afterwards during my whole intercourse with them, was the least attempt to exhort more than the stipulated price. I had purchased 200 pair of shells. Some weeks later when a dearth of tomahawk was impending, I raised the price to 15 pair of shells, there was no dissatisfaction expressed (QSA: COL/A160.71/2499)

Chester's means of extracting marine commodities from traditional Islanders through improper means is an example of colonialism and, according to Beckett (1987, p. 13), in later years Islanders were to suffer the full effect of exploitation where "...discrimination is sustained by some form of ideology which justifies the domination of the indigenous population in terms of differences of race, mentality, moral qualities, cultural advancement or religion". Beckett suggests that the discriminative process varied according to motives for colonisation, territorial control, the settlement of surplus population, contestation for natural resources, or the exploitation of labour. Financially, Islanders were also the victims of progress and "were soon repelled by dishonest employers and abusive skippers" (Beckett 1987, p. 37). One discriminatory method is the exploitation of the less dominant groups by the most dominant based upon power. According to Chambliss, from a global perspective,

There are various means by which this transformation can be effected; to begin with, by virtue of its coercive power, a new elite is in a good position to rewrite the law of the land as it saw fit. This affords them a unique opportunity, since by its very nature law is identified with justice and the rules of right. (1973, p. 256).

Progressively, the new dominant group in Torres Strait was made out of outsiders, in particular colonial Queenslanders whose interventions provide an overarching perspective in the following analysis.

Aspects of the Islands' History of Development

The rise of the marine industry began in the central Torres Strait. It was Captain

Banner who first coaxed Tudu Islanders (Warrior Is) to wade for pearl shells in 1868: the expansion of this industry had been different for the various Islands. Singe (1989) recorded that “ [Captain] Cook in 1770 noted the presence of pearl shell in the Strait and since that time the abundance of shell in the northern Australia and particular in the Torres Strait had been commented on repeatedly” (Singe 1989, p. 31). Singe (1989) elaborated that “ [Captain] Banner returned to Sydney where the arrival of tons of good shell at three to four hundred pounds a ton caused a stir in the bustling entrepot port, and in the next few years swashbucklers from all over the Pacific flocked to Torres Strait” (Singe, 1989, p. 32). It was in this initial phase of pearling that, according to Haddon (1935, p. 305), traditional land tenure was not affected by outside law “But the custom, which has grown up of late years, of living on the earnings of the numerous natives employed in the pearling industry has certainly done much to weaken the force of ancient traditions with regards to property”. Sharp’s analysis of colonial reports notes that as the industry developed economically so too was there social expansion. In order to control this, Queensland law came into force, in particular towards Torres Strait Islanders:

On 18 July 1879, the Governor of Queensland authorised annexation of certain islands lying between the coasts of Australia and New Guinea. In November and December of that year, Captain C. Pennefather of the QGS *Pearl*, made an official voyage from island to island to proclaim to the inhabitants their new subordinate status. On 10 November at Tutu, Warrior Island, the eighty-five inhabitants were ‘mustered’ and given public notification of defeat.

I told them that in future they would be amenable to the laws of the white man as the island now formed part of the territory of Queensland. In the afternoon I fired five shells from the guns close to the island and from a distance of 200 yards, which had the effect of showing them what could be done if necessary (Pennefather, *Report of a Cruise*, 19 December 1879), (Cited in Sharp 1993: 26 – 27)

Beckett, (1987) argues that under colonial administration the separate cultural groups of Islands underwent changes but at different levels. Western politics adopted into customary law became an adopted culture that saw the Meriam (Murray Islanders) regarded as the “Irish of the Torres Strait: with a long tradition of resistance to colonial authority” by clinging to customary laws (Beckett 1987, pp. 19-24). In principle, the colonial practice of “indirect rule” was introduced to override tradition through the engagement of the Mamoose who was appointed to rule using the both the old and new ways of administration. In 1878, Captain Pennefather who inspected

the Eastern Islands found that the Meriam people had built a church capable of holding the population of 374; a courthouse and police lock-up. He referred to the Island as the headquarters of the LMS, where the local chief or headman (the Mamoose) was the law with ten to twelve men as his constabulary to keep the peace (cited in Beckett 1987).

On Erub, the Erubians (Darnley Islanders) who had intermittent and spasmodic contact with European vessels and crew were the first group to accept the LMS missionaries in mid 1871. Prior to the introduction of Christianity, the people of eastern Torres Strait Islands had exposure to the presence of European beche-de-mer fishers and Pacific Islander crewmembers. On Erub, these outsiders were operating beche-de-mer processing stations for the export of processed products. The Erubians were active participants in the beche-de-mer industry as processors and as swim divers¹⁹ harvesting the sea slug. The official reports by Captain Pennefather in 1879 (during his official tour of all the Torres Strait Islands after declaring the annexation of Torres Strait) mentioned that at Erub, outsiders engaged in the industry, were residuals and most were married into the local population:

The South Sea Islanders living here, who are the worst characters in the Straits, too lazy to work for an employer, preferring to loaf on the natives whom they bully to support them and whom also put up to all kind of mischief, that they could not stop on the island. These men if they were allowed to have their own way, would possess themselves of all the best land and plantations on the Islands (QSA: COL 1A 288. 80/460).

It was the same for the Western Torres Strait Islands, in particular Mabuiag (Jervis Island) that had similar set up in beche-de-mer and pearl shelling. Beckett notes that Torres Strait Islanders who were working under Pacific Islanders boat skippers were capable of earning good money. Such engagement over a period of time exposed Islanders to the wage labour system and gaining experience in the Western markets and economy. The increasing intervention of the Queensland government into Islander affairs after 1879 saw the passing of new and amended laws by Queensland such as The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts, from the 1800s leading into the 1930s. Such laws were enacted to restrict the mobility of

¹⁹ Swim dive is swimming and diving in shallow waters for pearl and trochus shells, using diving goggles without (non-mechanical apparatus) a diver helmet and canvass diving suit; using compressed air (mechanical). Swim dive and diver are two descriptions used in the marine industry in the early years of harvesting marine products. Traditional Islanders used the low tide to collect pearl shells for pearl meat and the shells are used for sacred ornaments and traditional art decorations.

Islanders' employment, conditions and wages. It became the responsibility of the Protector for Native Affairs (Trigger 1992, p. 42).

In the long term, the intrusion of a modern economy, with its paternalistic laws, into Torres Strait supported by the introduction of Christian institutions throughout the Islands. Consequently, paternalism had an effect on the people from the Central Island of Tudu. It had introduced Western goods into the traditional system of reciprocity so that traditional trade with neighbouring partners in New Guinea had diminished. Those Tudu Islanders with kinship ties with their northern neighbours, made efforts to keep the flow of traditional exchanges with trade partners in New Guinea. In his effort, Maino, the Mamoose and traditional Chief of Yam and Tudu Islands, gave a combination of traditional and Western articles of considerable value in customary Islanders' terms as bride price:

That he paid for his wife a camphor-wood chest that came from Singapore in which he placed seven bolts (*i.e.* pieces) of calico, one dozen shirts, one dozen singlets, one dozen trousers, one dozen handkerchiefs, two dozen tomahawks, one dozen hooks, two fish lines, one long spear, one pound of tobacco, and two pearl shells (Haddon 1904, p. 231)

As the maritime industry intensified through the demand for marine commodities, the need for local labour also increased. Despite colonial restrictions and the labour shortage, the development period created opportunities when colonial authorities permitted a greater involvement of Torres Strait Islanders in the industry. Islanders would later outnumber Europeans on boats. As the industry progressed, Torres Strait Islanders as crew, divers and boat skippers would dominate the marine industry as a workforce, despite the paternalistic conditions of colonial Queensland. In the 1900s, a later addition into the marine industry was a market for trochus shells. According to Haddon (1904, p. 15), this commodity was to be the second most important industry for Torres Strait in value to that of pearl shells.

The impact of a modern globalising economy pushed Torres Strait Islanders to become increasingly reliant on wages and Europeans goods and Islander determination made them a skilled workforce in the marine industry. This was not the case for all Torres Strait Islanders; they are all subjected to Queensland law and, according to Beckett, "in reality the mission reproduced the economic contradiction in which the Islanders in the push and pull of an industrial system that required the

continuance of subsistence production” (Beckett 1987, p. 43).

Colonial Impediments

The socioeconomic situation of Torres Strait Islanders was created by a minority of dominant outsiders; the pearling merchants who were supported by government officials and the officials themselves who had colonial directives to exert local control. Other nationalities were also participants. Some were traders of imported goods, whilst others were directly involved in the harvesting and exporting of marine products. Their domination created a one-way direction that allowed non-Islanders to accumulate wealth less Torres Strait Islanders who were on meagre wages. In the process, the Islands were divided into administrative groupings for colonial administration along lines of purely Western drawn boundaries (The Eastern Island group, the Western Island group, the Central Island group and the top Western Islands). It was a strategy to divide and impose that it failed to contain the considerable diffusion, culture dynamism and fluidity that Torres Strait Islanders had traditionally practiced. It made the Islanders’ lands into a melting pot for cultural reciprocity and exchange and each Island group developed a separate style of administration that had evolved from the colonial division of traditional boundaries. For example, the engagement of Western Islanders in the marine industry does not have the same significance for equality as on other Islands. This group, and in particular Badu, displayed a different style of authoritative administration that created a division of labour mobility and meant that the less political motivated groups were at risk from the collusion of Island leaders and colonial authorities. Beckett (1987, p. 147) notes that: “There was no question of ‘*everybody mamoose*’ on Badu: in the words of a Meriam, long resident on the Island “*They just put their heads down and say Yes! All they know is how to say Yes!*” For Torres Strait Islanders, such a method was same as the way their lands were divided by colonial boundaries and with the arrival of the LMS in 1871, their intrusion contributed mentally to the Islander way; to think and act differently in ways to serve and accommodate colonialism:

As Islanders came to live, and, even more, to think with their work ethic, their loyalty and their Christianity, colonial culture became hegemonic, ‘a lived dominance’ (Beckett 1987, pp. 108-14).

Intentionally, the colonial source of integration by social control led traditional

Torres Strait Islanders to experience a life of deprivation in economic privileges, as is echoed in Balandier's concept of colonialism:

The lack of unity of the colonised society, and even more so because of its cultural heterogeneity, the relationships between exploiter and exploited, between the dominant and the dominated, are anything but simple.” (1965, pp. 40 - 41)

The capabilities of Torres Strait Islanders to learn and adjust to external influences are reported by the imperial thinking of John Douglas, Police Magistrate to Torres Strait. In the 1900s he insisted that Torres Strait Islanders should be exempt from the provisions of the White Australian policy: “Their marked mental superiority over the mainland native asserted that they were capable of exercising all the rights of British citizen, and ought to be regarded as such” (Beckett 1987, pp. 44-45). Despite this suggestion, the official request was not considered by the colony of Queensland, and Torres Strait Islanders remained part of “The larger matrix created by European expansion and the capitalist mode of production” and it is the essence of capital capacity to mobilise labour (Wolf, 1982, pp. 334-355). Islanders' incapacity to prosper was noted by a European guest of the Protector who toured the Islands in 1920, and who complained of the lack of industry in these parts in particular, pearling, beche-de-mer and trochus shelling:

It is nothing short of a great blot on the national character and a reflection on the enterprise of the people to have to admit that we are not in a position to utilise locally the pearl shell, trochus shell, [and] other associated products now exported to other markets in London, America, Japan and China. The position cannot be otherwise, as employment of white labour would prohibit the establishment of any such industries in the islands of Torres Strait. (Singe, 1989, p. 159)

The marine industry instead gave rise to the “the founding of the great [outsider's] pearling dynasties – Duffield, Hockings and others” (Singe 1989, p. 159).

The Making of State through Culture and Resources: The Maritime Industry

According to Beckett “The Queensland government established its jurisdiction in the wake of this economic development, initially to protect shipping [and] secure its northern marches from the encroachments of foreign colonialism, but also to bring some order to an industry that was proving increasingly profitable” (1987, p. 100). For State development, the capital was found from pearling and other industries on

the mainland. From the marine industry between 1871 and 1899, it generated an export income of £295,000 per year and, over a span of 28 years gave approximately £10,500 per year to the State of Queensland, totalling £339, 000 (Haddon 1935, Vol.1, p. 14). Haddon's estimates do not take into consideration the primary extractions of pearl shell by Captain Banner in 1868 and later others who joined him to commercially exploited the shell beds of Torres Strait. This was a period prior to the intervention of Colonial Queensland in the mid 1870s. In another record, Saville-Kent (1893, pp. 204-209) noted that production from the extractions of marine resources at the beginning of the 1900s onwards, ranked the pearl-shell fishery as the sixth in the State of Queensland. It had an export market with an estimated value for four years from 1884 to 1888 of £451,070 (cited in Haddon 1935, Vol. 1, p. 13-14) from Saville-Kent's accounts (1893):

The importance of the pearl-shell fishery as representing one of the most valuable natural sources of wealth to the colony that so important an industry, every attention and encouragement, in the direction of judicious conservation and scientific development" (Saville-Kent 1893, p. 204-233).

For Torres Strait, the production its marine resources became a contestation over resources in pearl shells, beche-de-mer and trochus shells, and the cultural aspects of Torres Strait Islanders remained functional for the extraction. The industry contributed to the primary infrastructure development of Queensland and Torres Strait Islander was pulled into the ideologies of outsiders who maximised the use of traditional labour. Motivated by their eagerness for Western goods, Torres Strait Islanders were productive and often very supportive of the colonial domain whose interests were overriding Islanders' affairs. The results dissolved the pattern of tradition:

All our grand fathers and grandmothers was out there doing the same kind of work, you know Island women used to swim dive in those days for shells like Island man, we all wanted to make money, same as the white man to buy good things, we did make money before they stop us (M. G. 2000, pers. comm., June)

The economic importance of Torres Strait Islanders to colonial Queensland during this period was controlled through the efforts of Islander skippers, Island pearl divers and crewmembers under the Protector's rule remain unchanged. Working under such conditions remained dangerous and boat skippers were tied to the ethic of working hard. From Beckett's description of working conditions on boats from Badu Island

we see that, “There was no direct challenge to the view that there was no danger ‘as long as you’re careful’. Rather there was contempt for the skipper who did not himself put on the helmet, he was only a ‘deck diver’ (1987, p. 162).

Local Labour and Western Values

The levels of extraction of some marine products are contained in the following table, over a time span of 25 years for the State of Queensland. It is a period when Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines participated with Malays, Japanese, and Pacific Islanders on pearling boats owned by the Queensland Government, under the control of the Protector for Aborigines. European pearling masters were on Thursday Island and Torres Strait Islanders recruited to work these boats, made the greater number as crew members and divers.

The statistical table accounts for the periods between 1916 and 1941, the quantity and value of each commodity extracted and exported in 25 years are: 22,988 tons of pearl-shells valued at £2,641,846; 5,041 tons of beche-de-mer valued at £602,099 and 13,629 tons of trochus shells valued at £883,560. The estimated export value generated £4,127,505 from 41,658 tons of marine products in consolidated revenues for Queensland.

The primary intention of the Queensland government was not directed at Indigenous development. Instead, the Queensland Parliament had legislated strict regulations that controlled labour, and in particular the use of cheap Indigenous labour in the marine industry. The legislation, according to Trigger (1992, pp. 43-44), made labour relations with Indigenous peoples part of a complex series of laws and amendments, where Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines were directly supervised under its terms. On the pearling and beche-de-mer boats, with some Asians and Japanese, the crews mainly consisted of men from different cultural backgrounds: “Cape York Aborigines, South Pacific Islanders and Torres Strait Islanders” (Saville-Kent 1893, p. 206). He reported that although Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines made up the greater numbers as crew members, the mechanical operations, a specialised skill (with diving equipment,) was restricted (a protectionist measure for Torres Strait Islanders) to men from Manila, Japan and Malaysia, indentured to the

Table showing the quantity and value of pearl shell, trochus shell and beche-de-mer exported from Thursday Island during the years ended 30th June, 1917 to 1941 inclusive**

Years	Pearl shell **		Trochus		Beche-de-mer	
	Qty/Tons	Value/£	Qty/Tons	Value/£	Qty/Tons	Value/£
1916-17	189	28,111	933	25,610	558	35,550
1917-18	268	42,204	611	24,116	533	45,890
1918-19	309	55,143	598	35,594	248	32,123
1919-20	388	77,286	568	51,020	279	51,121
1920-21	338	53,987	295	21,942	365	57,151
1921-22	282	28,991	265	12,678	228	39,238
1922-23	942	129,073	445	18,450	392	45,053
1923-24	875	120,824	459	19,984	179	23,048
1924-25	1,246	200,334	739	46,195	186	23,548
1925-26	1,150	144,283	1,006	80,181	125	12,688
1926-27	923	121,463	1,080	76,320	305	29,383
1927-28	1,202	167,487	802	61,363	146	13,908
1928-29	1,086	161,515	747	60,219	163	16,449
1929-30	1,430	213,464	506	38,725	181	21,199
1930-31	800	113,399	603	39,604	181	13,614
1931-32	470	76,207	518	33,168	441	33,437
1932-33	416	69,082	558	40,433	246	19,265
1933-34	611	76,582	409	38,050	195	18,362
1934-35	818	86,502	551	48,397	140	14,044
1935-36	1,112	123,421	411	37,899	191	13,705
1936-37	1,104	140,371	284	34,094	75	8,877
1937-38	855	90,438	228	26,676	121	15,115
1938-39	1,284	121,148	373	29,759	108	9,091
1939-40	1,245	122,068	319	28,784	23	979
1940-41	1,116	149,303	50	3,404	98	9,150

Compiled from the returns contained in the Annual Report, Marine Department, to 1927 - 28; Department of Harbours and Marine, from 1928 - 29. (Note: all quantities to the nearest ton).

** Figures to 1936 - 37 include very small quantities of extremely value black lip [pearl shell] and dead shell.

industry and regarded as excellent divers.

For the people of Torres Strait, the marine industry meant social disaster instead of progress. The *Pearl Shell and Beche-De-Mer Act 1881*, passed by Queensland seemed mainly to protect the interests of the government. It prohibited any foreigners or outsiders from engaging Torres Strait Islanders or their mainland counterparts, the Cape York Aborigines in unrestrictive employment. Saville-Kent noted between 1880 to 1889, a period of nine years, 41,667 tons of beche-de-mer was exported from Queensland with an total export value of £187,104 and those

“Employed in the gathering of beche-de-mer consists chiefly of mainland Aborigines, or ‘Binghis’ as they are termed in the North with a frequent admixture of Torres Strait and South Sea Islanders and Manila men” (1883, p. 227). In reality, the Queensland Indigenous population was the main source of labour force, particularly Torres Strait Islanders who served in the pearling industry up to the 1900s. The Islander and Aboriginal crew in the marine workforce had experienced the effect of the White Australia policy with a “Patterning of Racial Segregation” according to Sharp:

Those who came under the provisions of the Protectors Acts after 1901 – Aborigines and Islanders – were excluded from Thursday Island society, and where possible, from the Island itself, the business and administrative centre of the area of the Torres Strait as boat crews their movements were restricted to the area of the boat houses (Sharp 1993, p. 132)

Sharp referred to this period as the era of “The Supervision of Exclusion” [where] “Kole [Whiteman] rule in the Torres Strait was inaugurated in 1879” (1993, pp. 43-44). It was then that Queensland annexed the whole of Torres Strait to take complete supervision of Torres Strait Islanders as a mean of control over Islander economic independence and social advancement. Sharp suggests this as one of three distinct periods overlapping segments of colonial rule:

The first phase covering the two decades leading up to federation in 1901 which was characterises by a form of supervision known to British Colonial practice as *indirect rule*. In 1886, a code was drawn up delegating powers to a *mamus* [Mamoose] who had magisterial power; was directly responsible to the government resident at Thursday Island. The second phase that of a paternalistic exclusion which began soon after 1901 formally speaking this phase was replaced by a third phase of *controlled integration* which combined the labour needs of post – Second World War capitalist expansion with continuing paternalist segregation (1993, p. 130).

In the third phase, Sharp reiterated that every able bodied Island man was forced to work on the “Company” boats²⁰ partly owned by Islanders under loans from the trade station on Badu Island. Trading as the PIL (Papuan Industries Limited) since 1904 under the former LMS missionary, the Rev F.W. Walker, sixteen years later in 1930, the government purchased the trade station and placed the Islanders’ assets (boats)

²⁰ These “Islands-operated boats were called “company boats” and luggers run by the European-owned pearling companies were often called “master’s boats” [and] by the end of 1920s, nearly one-quarter of the pearling fleet in the Torres Strait were company boats” (*Pearling in the Torres Strait – A collection of historical articles*, 1986: 26, A Thursday Island State High School Student Publication). (see also Singe 1989; Beckett 1987).

and Island operations under control of the Protector. Under the Protector of Aborigines, its agencies had control “over who worked on the company boats and the money the men received from gathering pearl and trochus shell [the agent had powers] to take boats away from the islands if he believed men were not working them enough” (*Pearling in the Torres Strait, A collection of historical articles* 1986. p. 26). According to Sharp, control of the Islanders’ resources and welfare saw Islander men contributing their earnings into a trust account operated by the Protector for Aborigines:

An Island fund was established through which deductions from Islander owned pearling boat earning has contributed towards the upkeep of the Islands. The reduction of all aspects of personal autonomy with associated punitive powers, concerned earnings, crewing of boats, and; restriction on movements of boats, or personal movement (a curfew) and on being seen walking or talking with a member of the opposite sex, especially a white person (1993, p. 131).

Beckett (1987, pp. 51-53) agrees that Torres Strait Islanders working under the Protector’s rule for minimum wages were placed at the margin of development in the pearling industries. It was a time when the industry was at its peak and during a period when the White Australia Policy had laid down the “pattern for social development that Australia would have to follow into the twentieth century” (Cohen & Black n.d., p. 19). According to Stone (1974, p. 175), the government anthropologist Donald Thompson in 1937 wrote of his concern about the inhumane policies of governments on the Aboriginal population, making recommendations for change to his superiors:

I think that it should always be remembered that in making black white men of these people we do them the greatest wrongs, since with our rigid adherence to the “white Australia” policy, we are not prepared to admit them to real social equality, which would obviously be the only possible justification for such action, even if for biological and cultural reasons, it were workable.

Overtly, the White Australia Policy worked in many ways that affected Torres Strait Islanders, whose economic and social progress was closely monitored by the Protector, with controlled measures to prohibit Torres Strait Islanders gaining a foothold as competitors in a volatile market for marine goods.

The Purpose of ‘Special Stores’ and Islander’s Economic Control

The PIL as ‘special stores’²¹ were strategically placed on most Islands as agencies to protect Torres Strait Islanders from ‘global consumerism’ (Beckett 1987, p. 50). Changing the name of the PIL to AIB (Aboriginal Industries Board), marine commodities harvested by Islander men were sold either through these stores on the Islands or unloaded for processing at the main depot on Thursday Island. This meant that all goods came under scrutiny of the Protector, and whatever was gained by the Protector from the sale of marine products was channelled back to colonial coffers, giving little or no control at all to Islanders to manage their economy. Prior to the purchase of the PIL by Queensland, the PIL was a trading enterprise initiated to purchase all marine commodities harvested by Torres Strait Islanders at a fair market price. However, such a practise would break the monopoly of mercantile pearling masters on the world’s market for marine produce. It gave the Protector for Aborigines an excuse for continual interference in the daily running of the PIL. Eventually, the PIL was sold to the State:

In 1930, the Queensland government bought out Papuan Industries Limited. This meant the company boats were now owned and run by the Queensland Government. This company was the beginnings of the present Island Industries Board operating on Thursday Island. (Cited in the *Pearling in the Torres Strait*, p. 26)

The restructuring of the AIB to IIB (Island Industries Board) in 1939 (Beckett, 1987, p. 55) led to the establishment of a board of directors (non-Islanders) to oversee the business. These non-Islanders made decisions on the running of the IIB and supervised the purchase of marine products. Based on Thursday Island, the IIB distributed a range of wholesale goods via government stores in Brisbane to the outer Torres Strait Islands, purchased by Islanders at retail prices. Those Islanders, who were recommended by their Island Chairpersons as capable of managing a store, were employed as store managers, customer service attendants and general hands. The overall management and running of the Islanders’ fishing fleet and trading station came under jurisdiction of the Protector for Aborigines. These operations were financed entirely from local profits generated by Torres Strait Islanders in the

²¹ According to Beckett (1987), it was the legislation of the *Torres Strait Islander Act of 1937* that incorporated change “Aboriginal Industries now became the Island Industries Board, however the Government retained its control over the Islanders’ boat and earnings, and its economic regime remain unchanged (Beckett 1987, p. 55).

marine industry. The administrative report as recorded by the Protector (noted from The Protector's Report of October, 1933) to the state, noted that the scheme required no government handouts or assistance from other institutions and that all individual Islanders were made to contribute 20% of their earnings to the 'Island Funds'. The net profits accumulated were used for services, provident purposes, boat maintenance and refitting, crew insurance funds, a Torres Strait Seaman Hospital and family maintenance allowance (Sharp 1993; Burchill 1972; Beckett 1987). Islanders were permitted a savings account in their name but withdrawals from their accounts required permission to control when and how Islanders should spend their meagre earnings. The pearl trading stations (in particular Badu Island) provided some Islanders with education and industry training as shipwrights in boat building, refitting boats and dinghies, and as maintenance crew for other marine activity.

The annual notes on the administration of the Torres Strait Islands in 1933 mentioned that the Chief Protector in 1932 permitted the majority of the Islanders' fishing fleet to harvest the reefs for trochus shells adjacent to their home Islands and extending south to the mainland and "the Protectors, however, were now committed to the scheme and they persevered, even expanding the fleet to take advantage of the boom that followed the First World War" (Beckett, 1987, p. 51). It reported that all marine produce was directed to Thursday Island for sale under authority of the Protector for Aborigines to agents in London who auctioned the commodities to prospective buyers, with the proceeds sent back to be managed by the Protector for Aborigines. For mid 1932, the Protector reported that the boats had earned £18,813 and this amount was added to finalise the investments made by the Queensland Government for purchasing boats for Islanders' self economy; leaving a credit of £14,374 to the Native Trust Funds with no outstanding debts owed to governments. It seems the paternalistic measures of colonial policies were not aimed at improving local conditions. Its logic was rather to keep Islanders in employment to contribute to the 'Native Trust Funds' for the Islands' administrative upkeep and its effects had minimise governments' spending on Islanders' welfare (Cited in the *Notes on the Administration of the Torres Strait Island*, 1933). According to Beckett (Ibid) the *Brisbane Telegraph* in January 1936 reported a speech by the Queensland Minister for Aboriginal that "the natives of Torres Strait Islands were self-supporting and in

addition the Islanders' efforts were contributing something towards the support of aboriginals on the mainland'.

The economic strategies initiated by the Protector for Aborigines for Torres Strait Islanders are noted by Beckett (1987, p. 50):

Special stores for Islanders further protected them against the dangers of consumerism by carrying only the barest necessities. Purchases at these stores were entered against whatever money the customer had in his government passbook, so that he did not even see the money he earned. And, as if this was not enough, the Protector transferred a percentage of each worker's [boat crews, domestics and Islanders in the public service] into an island fund, which would carry his community over a period of famine or unemployment. In 1913, the percentage for single men was set at 20%, a rate well above what a European worker paid in tax In later years the Chief Protector wrote that this fund [Island Fund] had provided for old age pensions, uniforms for village police, medical and sanitary services, and general improvements throughout the years (Bleakley 1961: 68). The government also used its control over Islanders' money to acquire on their behalf boats which they [Islanders] would work independent of the [pearling] masters.

The strategy would progress into later years confronted Islanders and in regards to change, Beckett (1987, p. 55) states that:

The Torres Strait Islander Act of 1939 incorporated these changes and, in the process, met the Islander's desire to be distinguished from Aborigines. Aboriginal Industries now became the Islander Industries Board. However, the Government retained its control over the Islander's boats and earnings, and its economic regime remained unchanged. Reading between the lines, it seems as though the O'Leary [Chief Protector] reconstruction was an attempt to achieve indirect means what the teacher – supervisors had failed to achieve by coercion. Subsistence and commercial production were now to derive their self-sustaining dynamics from within the community, and to be articulated by local institutions.

The Act of Impartiality: A Colonial Condition

Torres Strait Islanders were active participants in industry and as the industry expanded, colonial laws became directed against Indigenous advancement. Many Islanders were aware of these impositions and became competitive in the marine industry to prove of their capacity to maintain an independent lifestyle and working hard was not a new problem for Torres Strait. Trigger, (1992, pp. 443-51) described the working conditions of Aboriginal people in Queensland in the 1930s as "the negotiation of labour relations" between masters and servants. Whatever conditions

were placed on Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders would suffer the same effects, but Islanders responded well to hard work. In his study of Aboriginal life at Doomadgee in Queensland, Trigger suggested that a major concern for colonial officials was access to Aboriginal labour under these conditions:

In Queensland, *The Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts* 1897 to 1934, and successive Regulations under them required people to apply for a permit to employ ‘Aborigines’ and ‘half-castes’, and then complete a written ‘agreement’ containing the names of the parties, the nature of the service to be rendered by the employee, the wages or other remuneration, length of employment (although after twelve months a new agreement was required), and so on. Police Officers and local protectors were expected to oversee and witness these arrangements and they could (after an amending Act in 1901) receive the wages of Aboriginal workers and manage both this money and the property of all Aborigines. Subsequent Queensland legislation retained the emphasis on ‘protection’ of the Aboriginal workers through paternalistic management of his or her labour, wages, property, and movement. (Trigger, 1992, p. 44)

According to Beckett, (1987, p. 108) Torres Strait Islanders had contested their social conditions “remarking that the DNA [Department of Native Affairs] fixed the wages and controlled education [and] their economic conditions was the consequence of political decision”. In the long term, the reward for Torres Strait Islanders was one of ongoing change whereby particular individuals, whose status and powers conformed to the new order, strove to accommodate an indirect administration to break Island custom and tradition. Inevitably, this limited the opportunities for learning by the oppressed, an aspect of the creation of wealth where the colonised share a very small part of it. One way to understand the colonial process of integration examined here is to compare it with Balandier’s African analysis (1965. p. 45): “when blacks and whites cooperate a phenomena of contact and social change evolved; moreover, when local resources and social change are at stake, both cultures come into conflict and the process now becomes distinct and not integrated.”

Although Torres Strait Islanders in the 1930s were aware of their predicament, most Islanders, especially those working in the marine industry, had resorted to non-violent resistance by coming together in a traditional way with their neighbouring Islanders to seek answers from the Queensland Government. Confronting their colonial masters about better social conditions, the Islanders continued in their protest and in the 1930s that they refused to work the government boats. It was noted in most of the Queensland newspapers at that time:

Island Strike that manifested itself across all the inhabited Islands “On Tuesday 14 January [1936] the *Brisbane Courier-Mail*, the *Brisbane Telegraph* and the *Cairns Post* announced [that] Men of the ‘Company Boats’ were on strike; ‘Natives on Strike, Decline to Work Island Luggers’, ‘Islanders on Strike’, ‘Official Inquiry Ordered, Payment for Fishing’, ‘On Strike, Torres Strait Boys, dissatisfied with pay’. (Sharp 1993, p. 181)

According to Beckett (1987, p. 48), “in plain terms, they have been overtaken by the worldwide tendency towards increased consumption, and were responding by demanding higher pay”. Although the Islands of Mabuiag and Badu were well under constraint by their Island leaders, the strike had only a temporary effect when Island leaders on Badu with the aid of protective law of the Protector persuaded locals to carry on in the industry. Those from the other Island groups who continued to remain on strike were described by Chief Protector Bleakly as ‘shrewd’ even as ‘sea lawyers’ (Ibid). He found it difficult to administer operations in Torres Strait when Islanders began to oppose the Protector’s policies of controlling their earnings. Instead of giving official approval towards Islanders for their efforts in the marine industry, the Protector (Bleakley) directed his citation to his employees and mission administrators of Aborigines on the mainland. In his report, he stated that his employers treated their Aboriginal workers well on the mainland who are credited “with a balance in the bank to their credit of £780. 14s. 6d [and] the rate of wages paid ranges from 5s to 20s per week. I personally interviewed a few of these natives and they, one and all expressed themselves as being quite satisfied” (Chief Protector of Aborigines, 1909) and later, the consequence for Torres Strait Islanders resulted when Murray Islanders the instigators in the Island maritime strike, lost their modern school.

According to Sharp, education too became the subject of the reward and punishment method:

The disappearance of the Murray Island School Number 774 was a quiet announcement that the Islanders were becoming subject to ‘Protection’ were now Aborigines for the purposes of the Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts, 1897 – 1901 [and] that change, was a move towards a closely watched segregation. (Sharp 1993, p. 128)

In his report to the Queensland Government, The Protector for Aboriginal had this to say:

The islanders have been assisted materially to procure boats, schools and teachers have been provided, the product of their labour carefully handled

and disposed of to the best advantage, and in many way favour given them which has been denied to those on the mainland [Aborigines]. It may be argued that these island people are more intelligent, industrious and reliable, but personally I hold a different opinion to say the Aborigine of the mainland is equal in intelligence and much more competent to perform more variety of work than the islanders. I do not think the boats procured by the islanders will prove an unmixed blessing [and] the interest in the natives owning a boat is now languishing. It is difficult to persuade them to work their craft [and] they themselves indolently pass the time away on shore (Chief Protector for Aborigines *Report*, 1903, pp. 6-7).

Sharp (1993, p. 161) noted that “soon after 1901 the priorities of a White Australia began to have widespread repercussions in the pearling industry” and the move marks clear intent on the part of the Queensland Government for control. The Christian incentives of the Rev. F.W. Walker for Torres Strait Islanders were in response to encourage Islanders to participate in the marine industry as means to increase their self-reliance to buy and own pearling boats. However the initiative for self reliance was soon gone when the:

Papuan Industries Limited (PIL) sold to the government in the 1930 and renamed Aboriginal Industries Board (AIB), set up branch stores at Murray, Darnley and Yorke Islands in 1932 and at Saibai in 1933. Each store was placed under the control of the government teacher on each island who was empowered by the Protector to control the bank passbooks of Islanders and to make available to them not money but credit in the AIB (Sharp 1993, p. 184).

Examining the intent of the Queensland for Torres Strait Islanders’ self-determination, I revisit the concept of religion and the state and analyse how religion had a major social effect on Islanders’ lifestyle. At the time of the arrival of Christian denominations into Torres Strait, religion played an important part in management of Islanders’ social and spiritual welfare, and affected the local economy. A global outlook on the roles of the church indicates that religion and social change is the cornerstone for economic forces in Torres Strait:

Religious values and requirements compete, in the lives of most men with other powerful interests and claims. He who seeks through religion, to change individuals or society must recognise and respond to the fact. As an institution that is adjusted to the secular claims and requirements of a society, the church is a recognition of those competing interests. The churches of a society represent the values, the needs, the interests of the people involved in them. (Yinger 1957, p. 301)

Torres Strait Islanders’ spiritual and social welfare was under the London Missionary Society (LMS) since 1871. In 1941 it became the responsibility of the Anglican

Church of England who worked with government officials and selected Island leaders (Mamoose) to control Islander welfare. In 1936, the Islanders' political protests for better conditions caused Queensland governments to give partial control to Island Councils as local Island government in cooperation with government officials and the church to manage the Islands and social affairs. According to Freire (1970, p. 59), writing from a global perspective, the political ends of the church and governments in particular with Third World countries are linked:

It is interesting to note how this happens with the church. The concept of 'mission lands' originates in the metropolis. For a mission land to exist there must be another which defines it as such. There is a significant coincidence between mission-sending nations and metropolises as there is between mission lands and the Third world. It would seem to us that, on the contrary, all lands constitute mission territory to the Christian perspective

Religious Politics: The Active Roles of the LMS

The records of the LMS, in relation to the administration of the Islands from 1871 to 1915, provide evidence of how the missionaries described Torres Strait Islanders' attitudes and behaviour. Haddon (1935) reported that the missionaries' activity began on Darnley Island and that the Rev. Murray of the LMS was told by Mr. Thorngreen, a European resident on Darnley that "[t]he population had dwindled to one hundred and thirty or one hundred and forty" from approximately five hundred due to diseases and other foreign intrusions (Haddon 1935, p. 190). According to Lawrie (1983), the Rev. Murray of the LMS recalls when their ship arrived at Erub (Darnley Is) on 1 July, 1871:

One man was seen on the shore. A boat was at once lowered and we pulled in to the beach... We got him to come into the boat and accompany us to the ship without difficulty though he manifested a little tremor at first. He understood a little English, and with the converse we were able to hold with him by words and signs, and giving him food and a small present, soon we had his full confidence. We sent him on shore again in the boat with an urgent request to come on the following morning accompanied by the chief or chiefs and as many others as possible.... In all probability it was the first act of worship to the true God that they had ever witnessed [and] We informed of our business and asked them [chiefs] whether they would treat him [Pacific Island teacher] kindly etc, etc. To [our entire enquiry] satisfactory replies were given and all passed off in the most satisfactory manner (*Torres Strait Islander*, Issue 3, 1983, pp. 8-9).

The Rev. Murray's accounts of how he viewed the people of Erub seem to me to paint a picture of first contact between explorer and explored, how the Erubians (Darnley Islanders) reacted to their presence, in company with their Pacific Islander

teachers. This was not the case for the LMS missionaries at Darnley Island. They were met with resentment from those South Sea and Pacific Islanders who were engaged in the beche-de-mer fisheries, who were already married into the local population and who were already responding to outside control. According to Singe (1989, p. 59), “Many of the South Sea Islanders were opposed to it, as they realised that it represented a first step towards an ordered community.” Haddon records that the Reverend Murray had referred to this event:

They [Darnley Islanders] have probably had intercourse with some foreign vessel, or have heard of natives who have on the fourth day he succeeded in obtaining barter, a grass hut for the accommodation of Gucheng, a native teacher of Lifu who with his wife and others was left to evangelize the natives” (1935, p. 190).

The measures the LMS missionaries took to persuade the local Islanders to accept a new religion included offerings of Western gifts had promises of better things through a new way of life. This historical event marks a turning point in the transformation of Torres Strait culture: the traditional pattern of separate clan group villages converged into a mission style settlement giving near total control and supervision of the Islanders to the missionaries (Beckett 1987, p. 33). According to Beckett (1987, p. 39) the LMS landed two teachers from the Loyalty Islands on Darnley Island in 1871 and ‘later followed the same procedure to convert the people of the North Western Island of Dauan, with two more Pacific teachers. Within a decade all the other inhabited Islands were under LMS administration. To Westerners, Christianity was viewed as a way of life. For traditional Torres Strait, Christianity was seen as a new cult with interesting ways and that differed from traditional belief. An alternative perception is to view the Church as colonial agents exerting control as many Torres Strait Islanders were converted or coaxed into the Christian faith. Burchill (1972, p. 2), writing from her knowledge as a medical professional, viewed the Islanders’ world as primitive during Christianisation:

The missionaries had a hard time to begin with. The islands were truly pagan and in most cases a stranger was killed instantly. Men slept with their weapons in hand, prepared to fight for their lives. It was a crime to awaken a chief of the tribe, and if a crying child woke him it was killed and eaten. But the supreme faith of the missionaries slowly overcame the suspicious of the Islanders, and once they had been accepted they were able to make rapid progress. The Islanders was quick to absorb the new teaching and having embraced Christianity they gave up headhunting and heathen worship.

According to Sharp, the LMS archival reports record a dedicated workforce who had

undertaken missionary work amongst the primitive society of Torres Strait:

Pastors from the Pacific Islands of Mare and Lifu were placed upon the islands at the 'option of the people'. It was firmly believed that if each missionary was '...was allowed to remain, he would, with the help and blessing of God, work his way among the people, and gain their confidence and affections' (LMS, 11 September 1872, p. 31). Within a few years, Islanders were helping to build churches which soon occupy central positions near the beach. Over twenty or thirty years the LMS recorded an 'enthusiastic' response to their [Islanders'] efforts. Islanders made available [traditional] land for the churches and mission houses. They raised money to buy the materials to build limestone churches and they offered their labour (Sharp 1993, p. 100).

Spreading the gospel in Torres Strait was rapid as traditional properties and habits were exchanged for what said to be the better things in life. Burchill (1972, p. 4) notes that a past Islander informant recalled the effect Christianity had on Torres Strait Islanders: *"The Gospel of Jesus Christ has come like a dynamite, shattered old evil customs, killed them dead, just like when dynamite is exploded in the water to kill all the fish"*. Whereas, the memories of the LMS intrusion are freshly embedded in my Elder who gave a different account from his experience:

I could refer to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, when it came to us, it 'was just intruding into our lives and also affect our people to say that, that the system of Christianity was better than ours and we have to just leave those bows and arrows behind, leave that cannibalism behind, and joined those beliefs that was better than ours and we were forced into those situation...we were forced into those situation, but those great principles, we didn't have to be taught about those things because we already had the principle of humbleness, the principle of sharing, the principle of....all those sort of things, the principle of land, you mention those things one should have as a human being, we had all those things and when that system in the colonialism movement came to us, it was only intruding into our lives [and] it really destroyed everything we were taught from the beginning, you know as Torres Strait Islanders we were there, [and] using some of our Elders words, "We were there since time immemorial", and to take that away from us, it certainly intrude[d] in a way that it set up an umpire for certain clan groups or whatever and left us nothing (S. M. , 2000, pers. comm., May).

Comparing this interview with the Aboriginal situation on mainland Australia we can discern the methods of colonial policies and religious indoctrination that also played a major role in destabilising Aboriginal culture and tradition. According to Stone:

Administration during this period was based on the idea of protecting the Aborigines from the harmful effect of white settlement, either by placing them apart in reservations or by making special laws and regulations to control the natives themselves and the actions of the white man towards them. During this period, the attitudes of white Australians was shaped chiefly by the fact

that the primitive Aboriginal and the detribalized Aboriginal who had learn only a smattering of European ways, did not follow the same habits of life as the rest of the community, were not restrained by the same beliefs and customs as the white people but had beliefs and customs of their own, and could not look after themselves and earn their own living in the normal way (1974, p. 194)

The disorder produced by many accepting Christian ways helped undermine traditional ways for Torres Strait Islanders and created a community which in the long term would depend on the church and government for new directions.

The Roles of the Pacific Islander Pastor/Teacher

The Christian order, introduced into Torres Strait by the LMS missionaries was dependant upon the supporting roles of the trained teachers from the Pacific Islands. These Pacific Islanders were part of the LMS Christian contingent who travelled with the missionaries to Torres Strait. They were trained as teachers in their homelands and came to convert and exert mission policies and principles to their own people according to the Christian faith. As such, they became middlemen and brokers for Christianity (see Paine 1971, p. 6). In Torres Strait, the Pacific Islander missionaries exerted pressure to accept LMS indoctrination in much the same way as the LMS had administered to their own people in the Pacific. According to Beckett:

Throughout the Pacific, the Society had been accustomed to running its missions as petty theocracies, sometimes in the absence of secular government, and such punishments as flogging, head-shaving and the stocks were imposed indifferently for secular and religious transgressions ...The pastors and teachers the Society brought to Torres Strait were the products of such regimes and more zealous than their European mentors. The Queensland government was eventually to break their hold, but for the moment it left them in charge. (Beckett, 1987, pp. 41-42)

The Pacific Islander teacher/pastor worked to suppress the significance of Islander tradition and beliefs. The LMS workers later oversaw the destruction of the Islanders' ancient shrines and idols (Beckett 1987, pp. 39-41). The undermining of customary law either by force or tutelage made it seem necessary for Islanders to become converts, even though some Islanders resented the presence of missionaries and the teachers. The Christian message, for re-socialising the old habits of Torres Strait Islanders, simplified the political task of control so that, according to Beckett (1987, pp. 42-43), the LMS conversion of Islanders involved "new ways of focus and ways of expressing claims and deference" based on the LMS policy for cultural

reconstruction. The evangelistic tasks of converting Torres Strait Islanders to Western practices, such as the wearing of clothing, new forms of education, new forms for dwellings all coupled with church laws and unpaid community service, demonstrate the force of coercive tutelage. A prominent Torres Strait elder said in the local newspaper:

He [Haddon] was told by our Elders that the LMS Missionaries were a threat to some of the traditional customs. They [LMS] were destroying our culture. There was an incident where some of our art works collected by the missionaries from some of our Islands were thrown into a big bonfire at Albany Island by LMS who were screaming “Demons!” Demons!” over the crying and wailing of the Islanders. This is recorded in Jardine’s reports [and] the only people who made money from selling our artefacts overseas were the LMS through Dr. Macfarlane to finance their mission (E. Bani. *Torres News*, 2002).

Thus the colonial constraints on Torres Strait Islanders were impassable, particularly at the time when Islanders’ were involved in the marine industry. It led Islanders to seek assistance from the LMS²². In response, Rev. Walker resigned from the LMS and in 1904 incorporated the PIL (Papuan Industries Limited). The PIL received a £50,000 charitable donation towards Islander advancement from large philanthropic firms on the Australian mainland. The Churches made their mark on the Islands in their teaching of the Christian code of ethics, persuading Islanders to continue to be active in the marine industry. In the marine industry, the Islanders’ salvation was exploited in the hands of the LMS so that the charity became enterprise loans that Islanders were obliged to work for:

The LMS was still looking after the spiritual welfare of the islands [and] it was a clergy man of this mission, Walker, who in 1904 brought in the greatest boon to the Islands, in the shape of the “Papuan Industries Limited” a properly constituted Company with a capital of £50,000 chiefly subscribed by large and philanthropic firms like Cadbury – they never got even the five percent dividend which was the limit allowed by the statute. (Raven-Hart, 1949, pp. 60-61)

The Rev. Walker had left the LMS to manage the PIL and according to Sharp, Islanders came from the different groups of Islands and were buying cutters and luggers on credit from PIL so that in 1907, eighteen and a half boats were fully paid for:

²² “Papuan Industries” according to Raven-Hart (1949, p. 62) “at first intended merely to lend out boats against repayments in this way: they [LMS] soon found that they had to handle the shell for the islanders in order to get fair prices for it, and to sell goods to the islanders in order to protect them from exploitation”.

The response was rapid and enthusiastic. In the first year two boats were purchased at Mabuiag and three at Murray Island. The latter three which had an earning capacity of £300 per year were fully paid for that year; they had been completely overhauled, and the people were taking great pride in their possession. (1993, p. 160)

It is evident that the rapid development and social change further pushed the Islanders into a way of life that saw the acceptance of a commodified economy. Kaye (1997, pp. 43-44) identified the significant problem confronting Islanders: “their growing dependence on import of foodstuffs and other items” made them reliant on a cash economy in which they had “limited capacity to earn money”. An example of the limitation of Islanders’ economic success was the incorporation of the PIL by the Reverend Walker who introduced Islanders to his concept of financial independence. It later failed them when the ownership of the PIL became the property of the State of Queensland. Kaye (1994, pp. 43-44), notes that

The scheme was a mixed success. On the credit side, the Islanders [were] well at paying off their boats and brought in a substantial amount of money to the local communities [but] on the debt side, once the boats were paid off the Islanders had little desire to continue to go after pearl shell and trepang [because] many Islanders failed to understand the “vagaries of the international pearl shell market” which was subject to quite substantial price variation.

Overall, the scheme was a failure giving rise to questions about the commitment of the LMS missionisation of Torres Strait Islanders between 1871 and 1915. In 1914, because of financial difficulties, the Society asked the Church of England to take over their Island converts from 1915. According to Raven-Hart (1949, p. 62):

One cannot help feeling that it must have been a shock to the islanders to discover (however tactfully it was put) that from one to the next they had ceased to be what the Services called “O.D.” (the LMS was inter-denominational but largely Methodist).

Moreover, according to the recorded notes of the ecclesiastical head of the mother church, the Church of England Bishop wrote:

When I first came to Thursday Island in 1900 I confess to casting very covetous eyes on the surrounding islands. They were so near, so convenient to visit from the centre of the diocese, inhabited by a people so attractive and full of interest that I wished with all my heart we had them under our care [and] fifteen years later Bishop White saw his dream fulfilled. (cited in Burchill 1972, p. 3)

The Islanders’ spiritual affairs and social well-being were now the responsibility of

the Church of England which carried out its functions in a manner slightly different to the LMS. The Church of England recruited and trained Islander priests (deacons) to manage their Churches on the Islands. Wages for the priests were mostly self-funded by Torres Strait Islanders' contributions to their local Church and whatever earnings or profits generated from gift giving, church collections or from other organised functions did not remain local:

The money goes from this and all islands, as credits through the Store and the I.I.B. [Island Industries Board], to the Bishop at T. I. [Thursday Island] a fixed sum is deducted by him, varying according to the size of the island, as "Church Dues", and from these are paid the stipends of the island priests and the allowances made to the candidates for the priesthood under training at T. I.. The rest of the money remitted is held separately for each island, and at the entire disposition of the Church Council, the Church has in no way lagged behind the State in giving self government to the islanders [and] the money is not idle at T. I.: the Bishop can make loans from the funds he hold...just as a bank may lend the deposit of one customer to the needs of another, on its responsibility. : (Raven-Hart 1949, pp. 94 – 95)

The departure of the LMS from Torres Strait, left their Islander converts with a legacy of good deeds: The Coming of the Light to Torres Strait in 1871 which is still celebrated annually by Torres Strait Islanders of Christian faith and the PIL to the Protector of Aborigines; a private Islander based company that directly involved Torres Strait Islanders in a fair and equitable way; and the handing over of their Island congregation to the Church of England trading as the Diocese of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

The Administrative Collusion of Representation

Colonial development of the Torres Strait was fractional following Queensland taking possession in 1879 as government interventions in commercial and non-commercial activities maintained Torres Strait Islanders as a debt society. This introduced a system through religious and political convictions that denied Islanders a fair employer/employee working relationships in areas of social and commercial developments. It failed Islanders through its model for representation of Islander management through the imposition of constant supervision and tutelage by religious education and political institutions. The process created a degree of incompetence among Islanders, as many were led to believe in their incompetence in comparison to non-Islanders.

In analysing Torres Strait Islanders' inability to be active participants in the commercial world, the answer may be found in the administrative collusion of representative politics through the establishment of the permanent character of the colonial bureaucratic machine. It was introduced into Torres Strait as a way of levelling social differences between Torres Strait Islanders and outsiders. I have adopted the analysis of Chambliss, (1973, pp. 334-335) for a broader understanding of how the structure of a functional order became a disorientated service for progression in Torres Strait:

Bureaucratic organisation has usually come into power on the basis of levelling of economic and social differences. This levelling has been at least relative, and has concerned the significance of social and economic differences for the assumption of administrative functions.

Holistically, this has been the end result of intensive outside tutelage and passive local resistance between the two parties. When considering tutelage for Indigenous advancement in the context of global colonial developments, the Islanders experience can be compared with Dyck's (1991, p. 25) example of the Indigenous people of Canada:

The control exercised by various tutors or tutelage agents over Indians have been founded upon one unshakable premise – the presumed moral and cultural 'superiority' of, first, European and, then Euro-Canadian society over native peoples. This doctrine of the cultural and, in some renderings, also the biological 'inferiority' of native peoples to Europeans was, of course, a by-product of the extraordinary economic and political ascendancy of Europe and the West from the late Renaissance to the twentieth century.

For Torres Strait, Government policies by 1890 reserved the Islands for the use and benefit of Torres Strait Islanders exempt of outsiders' influence and "the Function of the Protectors [in the 1930s] was to resist these pressures using their official powers they kept a tight hold on the islander's money" meant prohibition of Islanders' exposure to the use of the means of exchange in the commercial world (Beckett 1987, p. 48). Beckett goes on to note that their non-Islander representative agents, the government teachers, were set managerial tasks in primary education, magisterial roles in law and arbitration, medical aid, village development and village employment, and they even intervened in management of traditional fishing and swidden activities for sustenance (a cost saving exercise in administration). They were the administrators who were given extensive power of control whilst being

assisted by local appointees the Mamoose and his Island constabulary. In 1936, the colonial method of the Mamoose system was finally replaced by Island Councils, having with each Island group voting selectively for their representatives to replace the administrative roles of the government teachers.²³ The Island Councils (local government) consisting of: the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Councillors had the authority to enforce government's policies by utilising traditional customary law to their advantage. Overall, the colonial method of pursuing self-management and control came at the expense of producing Islanders' failure. According to Beckett's analysis (1987, pp. 55-56), the establishment of the new Island Councils saw Island communities "Subordinating the circulation of money and commodities to pre existing social relations they redistributing wealth in such a way as to offset any tendency towards permanent economic differentiation." That order, disguised as traditional management [partially controlled for and by Islanders] became an imposed condition so that "The Government's monopoly of retail trade left no room for local entrepreneurs, while its tight control over the supply of cash saved the subsistence sector from becoming monetised."

In broader, comparative, terms my interpretation of the Islander situation recalls Balandier's (1965, pp. 47-48) recognition that such a method in colonial Africa "calls into question the quasi-totality of society, the institutions, as well as groups and social symbols" to give an understanding of contact relationships "between the dominant and the dependent society" so as to that "crises affecting the total society creates vistas on this totality and on the fundamental relationship which it implies."

In Torres Strait, colonial influence has created individuation in the form of political representivity of Island communities so that those Islanders (Island Councils) who by "knowing how to talk to white people" (Beckett 1985, pp. 95-113) could administer themselves accordingly. This has continued in the current situation of Torres Strait Islanders who are formally represented by the Island Councils' Chairpersons with greater responsibilities in governance of Torres Strait Islanders' affairs. As such, the colonial history of Torres Strait Islanders has placed them amongst other Indigenous

²³ "The 1936 strike was the first organised Islander challenge to European" and at the end of 1936 the Protector O'Leary reported that "A greater measure of responsibility has been given to the councillors and they will now control a considerable portion of the domestic life of their communities which previously were the responsibility of the government teacher" (Beckett 1987, p.54 – 55)

peoples whose history has made “These people politically weak, economically marginal and culturally stigmatised members of the national societies that have overtaken them and their lands.” This accords well with Dyck’s account of the experience of colonialism for many of the world’s Indigenous populations:

The tiny internal colonies that make up the Fourth World are fated always to be a minority in their own lands [and] in the present, as in the past, aboriginal peoples are being subjected to government policies that, from one country to another, range from genocide to forced assimilation, from segregation to cultural pluralism. The form and substance of their relations with national and state governments are matters of fundamental significance in their everyday life and future prospects as indigenous peoples. (Dyck 1991, p. 1)

Dyck’s comment is a summary of the experiences of colonised Indigenous groups. It refers to how colonial influences have systematically shaped Indigenous societies through institutionalised control and in Torres Strait; the process has rendered not only Torres Strait Islanders but Aboriginal peoples as non-producers in the Australian economic system. Progressively, it made both peoples into welfare recipients, dependent on recurring financial support from governments. In contrast to the economic outcomes in the marine industry, fiscal spending by the authorities was minimal into Torres Strait (and Aboriginal communities) and, under control of the Protector for Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders were limited in their ability to interact with the broader community and even their rights to leave their region without permission from the Chief Protector were restricted. In the long term, those Islanders living under such a system saw less of their just monetary rewards, living instead from hand to mouth, an experience that greatly impacted on the social welfare of their families. This had an economic impact across the Island communal circle so that Kaye (1997) associated the social crisis with Islanders’ involvement in the marine industry was linked to a volatile competitive market. It meant that Islander families who had relied on the boats’ earnings had to supplement their incomes by other means (traditional food). It has also meant that Islander men under constant supervision by European and Asian boat owners were made to accept their income from a foreign market that varied from time to time, depending on the International sale price. Thus the Islander’s debts for running costs, equipment and stores making life so unbearable that “In the lean years, many Islanders resented the sudden and seemingly drop in their income [but] the Queensland government was sufficiently impressed by the system” (Kaye 1997, pp. 42-43). From my perspective,

this system has continued to shape the current situation of Torres Strait Islanders. Their economic situation has not changed due to changes in government policies linking them to programs and support services in a welfare orientated economy. In their present position, Islanders' needs and wants are addressed by political representation to governments for Torres Strait Islander self-determination or greater autonomy.

Torres Strait: A Political Economy

Since 1879, the welfare of Torres Strait Islanders has been the political responsibility of governments. In a broad context, the political interests are reflected in the lack of serious socioeconomic outcomes for Torres Strait Islanders that have prevailed throughout the development of Torres Strait through such indirect control. It supports my argument that the political interests of government produce a contestation for culture and resources made evident in Beckett (1987), Sharp (1993) and others. Kaye's study of the Torres Strait indicates that the Queensland government has recognised the strategic and economic space of importance of Torres Strait at the expense of Indigenous Torres Strait by loss of land, culture and their independence, through rapid western developments because:

Torres Strait is a principle trade route between the ports of eastern Australia and Southeast Asia and is of fundamental importance to Australia provides the most convenient sea link between east and west. (Kaye 1997, pp. 92-93)

A gradual ease on the restrictive powers of the Protector in 1936 was achieved during the inaugural 1936 Island Council Conference on York Island. Islander passive resistance had eased the conditions set down by the Protector reflecting a slight shift to indirect administrative authority to the Island Councils to manage their constituents. The economic downturn for pearl and trochus shells into the 1960s led to the decline of the marine industry in Torres Strait, a major source for Islander employment. Thus, Torres Strait Islanders having succumbed to impositions from outside had accepted the 'hard work' as a principle for self-determination. Consciously embedded in their minds by colonial tutelage, the motto to work hard is for the good of their country (Australia). It became an ideology; an addition to Ailan Kustom to respect your country men and work hard. However, economic hardship and new conditions being imposed upon Islanders through their Island Councils has meant most Islander men despite these restrictions absconded or left to the Australian

mainland. In search of better wages and living conditions for their families in Torres Strait, they found employment on the canefields of Queensland, worked as railway fettlers or on railway construction gangs on the mainland. In defiance of their restrictive conditions in past, the Eastern Islanders in particular, returned in strength with their hard earnings to their homeland Mer, to uphold their culture and tradition:

In the Christmas of 1976 more than one hundred Melanesian Australians returned to their homes on Murray Island, at the easternmost end of Torres Strait. They had come from the towns and cities of north Queensland, from the pearl culture stations on the Northern Territory, and from the new mining towns of Western Australia to celebrate the interment of a kinsman. (Beckett, 1987, p. 1)

According to Beckett, ‘working hard’ was a way of protesting to the authorities that Torres Strait Islanders are as good as the European counterparts and capable of managing their own affairs whilst not being subjected to colonial rules. Most evidently when they became heavily involved in the infrastructure developments on the Australian mainland, in particular, in constructions of new railway lines for the State of Queensland and in the Western Australia iron ore industry in the Pilbara. Beckett wrote:

Just as Torres Strait divers had striven to show themselves as good as Japanese after the war, so now Island fettlers [railway workers] set out to show that they were as good as Europeans. Although the union set a limit on the number of sleepers to be laid, the gangers acted like boat skippers, pushing their men to do more. When reminded that they got no more pay for this, they explained that they were doing it ‘for name’. Their enthusiasm recommended them to recruiters looking for men to work on contract in Western Australia. As one of them recalled, years later:

Them Yankees got contract to complete that line in five years, but we done it in six months. We stupid enough to do that, I mean we don’t know nothing about it. But for us, we play, just because the machine there to help us. And we enjoy with the jackhammer - like a dance. Oh we enjoy every bit of it; we never got tired. (1987, p. 202)

My interpretation of Beckett’s informant is that it refers to the construction of the Port Hedland to Mt Newman railway lines in the Pilbara of Western Australia. Working under contract to an American firm on this project, a team of 70 Torres Strait Islander men set the Worlds’ Track Laying Record by constructing a completed 7 Km section of track line in 11 Hrs and 40 Minutes. On top of that, the contract was set for 5 years while the full strength of Islander men with others, completed the contract in just over 6 months. It paints the picture of why my informant calls it *we*

stupid, because the Islanders were the ones who lost a favourable payout as bonus.

This chapter has provided an overview of the Islanders' contemporary lifestyle in order to understand their predicaments in the context of the dynamics of capitalism. In the next chapter it is necessary for me, as a Torres Strait Islander, to examine and write about the traditional culture of Torres Strait Islanders, as a basis for knowledge in the context of this shift in social and economic orientation.

Chapter Five

Interpreting Traditional Torres Strait: Insider's and Outsiders

Oral history is how my informants understand their own culture. Their voices talk of Islander culture as being rapidly eroded through modern technology and infrastructures and of the need to act: "That [Islander] children be trained to cope with mainstream educational system for modern survival, but at the same time be aware of their cultural background and identity" (E. Bani, *Torres News*, 28 November – 4 December, 2003). In putting this together, I have taken into account the literature of those outsiders or non-Islanders who have sought to understand Torres Strait in conjunction with the insider oral accounts of Islanders. In the past, the Islanders' culture was firmly embedded in traditional institutions bounded together as clans or tribal groupings, customary law, depicted in religious ceremonies and traditional stories, sacred songs and dances through rites of passage. The method I use to interpret my peoples' history is to construct a consciousness of tradition to reflect how my ancestors were positioned in organised systems of practiced habits and rituals. My concern is to show how these two ways of knowing – as outsiders and insiders – can be used to understand Islander social history. I find support for this approach in the work of my fellow Torres Strait Islander, Martin Nakata (1997, p. xii):

When trying to redress these practises, I and other fellow [Torres Strait] Islanders are accused by implication of 'getting in wrong' because we do not fully understand all that [our own history] has influenced the context that shaped our [Islander] experiences. A further criticism that Islanders have to endure is the implication that in putting down of our understanding of events via the oral tradition, 'popular memory' [the good things about Torres Strait ways of life] distorts, exaggerates, misunderstands, fabricates, or simply 'forget' the actual 'facts' of what happened

I have examined the oral testimony of my elders particularly for their worldview of the interrelatedness of Island custom and tradition and have reclaimed the past as the original culture and history of my people taking into consideration, the outsiders' interpretation of culture as support material in my argument.

The point is to bring readers a different way of looking at Torres Strait besides an economic and political history of development. Reclaiming my history identifies me as a Torres Strait Islander. As one recently deceased senior Islander elder once explained:

Knowledge is the foundation of understanding which accumulates to become wisdom of the ages [and] Wisdom is a virtue embedded in physical forms such as arts, technology, creating the atmosphere and identity of a particular society. Chop sticks identify you with oriental, the tall pole of totems in a long column of totemic arts tells you it belongs to American Indians. The boomerang, you attach with an Aborigine, whilst the great turtle shell mask gives us, the T. S. Islanders, the sense of identity (E. Bani *Torres News*, 2001).

Torres Strait Islanders have their own cultural practices, as distinct from those of outsiders, and through oral transmission it becomes the stock of local knowledge we were taught by our elders. Kottak's general comments on the analysis of myth are relevant here:

The anthropological study of religion is not limited to religion's social effects or its expression in rites and ceremonies. Anthropology also studies religious and quasi-religious stories about supernatural entities-the myths and tales of long ago or far away that are retold across the generations in every society. Myths often include people's own account of their creation, of the beginning of their world and the extraordinary events that affected their ancestors. They may also tell of deities or spirits either in an alternative world or as they come into occasional contact with mortals. Myths, legends, and folk tales express cultural beliefs and values. They offer hope, excitement, and escape. They also teach lesson that society wants taught. (1991, p. 39)

Prior to the colonisation of Torres Strait Islands, early Europeans who came to the shores or sailed through Torres Strait formed perceptions of the customs and beliefs of Torres Strait Islanders from a European worldview. Prior to the development of interpretative anthropology in the 1960s, according to Marcus and Fisher (1986), the European practises of interpreting the culture of others derived from nineteenth century accounts through generalisations of mankind came from travellers, explorers and colonial records and from talking to missionaries:

For sociocultural anthropologists, the most prominently remembered intellectual ancestors of that era are Edward Tylor and James Fraser in England, Emile Durkheim in France, and Lewis Henry Morgan in the United States of America who have characteristically, pursued [the] origins of modern institutions, rituals, customs, and habits through the contrasts of evolutionary stages in the development of human society their materials on contemporaneous "savage" or "primitive" peoples served them as living cultural analogies with the past. (Marcus and Fisher 1986, p. 17)

In Torres Strait, foreign interventions have rapidly changed Islander culture so that tradition had to adapt quickly to accommodate modern values, new infrastructures and institutions, when foreigners invaded Islanders' cultural space. Over time, these

changes have given Islander society a dependency on others through loss of heritage and it reminds us that conflict has marked the history of Torres Strait Islanders, encompassing both colonisation and development produced mostly by outsiders. This has been an oft repeated pattern in the world. As Chambliss states:

The conflict perspective insists that the history of any contemporary society must be taken into account in trying to understand that society. Certainly this is obvious when we are dealing with the question of industrialisation (Chambliss 1973, p. 20).

The question of industrialisation is not argued here. However, the marine industry had both positive and negative aspects of industrialisation as interjections in the lifestyle of my people. My elders have argued that Islander culture has changed considerably since Haddon, as a marine biologist, first visited the Torres Strait in 1888. From the memoirs of his second visit produced in the 1900s, Haddon described Islander culture connecting Torres Strait Islanders to local others, the Aborigines of northern Australia and Papua New Guineans. Haddon interprets Islanders' accounts of time and space as signifying the importance of local myths and legends that relate Torres Strait Islanders to cult heroes, cult bearers and creator beings, all of whom are related through the Islanders' clan/totemic groups. Haddon found that these supernatural beings provided traditional Islanders with skills and natural resources to survive in their culture area. Making reference to the connection of Torres Strait with others, Haddon writes:

According to tradition there have been numerous cultural movements to Torres Strait from Daudai [New Guinea] and between Islands. Very few influences have come from the Cape York Peninsula and these for the most part are reflex movements, as originally the cultures came to Australia from Papua through the Straits...In all mythologies cultural improvements and cultural spreads are usually associated with named persons. It is immaterial whether they existed as such, but it is convenient to employ these names as a concise method of recording the tradition. To the various culture heroes: Yarwar, the expert gardener of Badu, and Gelam came from the Western Islands and increased vegetable food of Mer. Sida or Soida who came from New Guinea, was the bestower of many good things. He instructed people in language, stocked reefs with the valuable cone shell and with other shells; He was the first to bring coconuts and bananas and other useful plants to man; [and] the greater fertility of the Eastern Islands as compared with the Western [Islands] is attributed to the treatment accorded to him in the different Islands. Sesere of Badu was the pioneer of harpooning dugong, and Bia of Badu taught people how to catch turtles by means of the sucker-fish. Kos and Abob of Mer built the first stone fish traps which they introduced into the Eastern Islands and into some Central Islands. The folktales state that the original inhabitants of Daudai [New Guinea] were in extremely low

state of culture they were raised by cultural influences coming from the north ... But the cultural influences from the north [New Guinea] spread into the Islands - when or what length of time this took we have no means of knowing. (Haddon 1935, p. 412)

Haddon's hypothesis of time and space in the development of Islander's local culture cites an exchange of ideologies between three cultural groups; Torres Strait Islanders, the Papua New Guineans and the Australian Aborigines of Cape York. It is the myths and legends that inter-connect the culture area of traditional Torres Strait, where trade and exchange between the three groups has taken place since time immemorial. The interpretation of this cultural connection corresponds with the Islanders' myths and legends depicting stories of culture-bearing hosts coming from Western Torres Strait and spreading their mythical deeds east across Torres Strait as far as Mer (Murray Is). These stories include accounts of the southern coast of New Guinea and the northern parts of Cape York on the Australian mainland, along a story line so that each Island produced its own accounts about how to interpret the mythical deeds and gifts of the cult heroes and culture bearers. Local legends connect the story lines to follow a sea traffic pattern of Islands, identifying responsibilities to trade with appropriate exchange partners. The concept of a "culture-connection" (Haddon 1935), when interpreted from an Islander perspective, outlines connecting with the periphery through traditional practices and development of cultural traits and traditional exchange. The story line describes how the myths and legends gave Islanders local knowledge for survival on their numerous Islands in Torres Strait.

An Overview of Accounts from an Islander Perspective

The course of action I have taken is to divert my attention from the perceptions of armchair ethnology by a reflexive perspective of being a Torres Strait Islander, to provide an interpretive account so that others may gain a meaningful insight into the making of culture and tradition of the Islands. Oral history is of the essence in the making of Torres Strait culture, handed down throughout the Islands as a form of communication according to customary law. I acknowledge the myths and legends of Torres Strait as directives, the history of places and I acknowledge the spiritual beings as my ancestors, who have materialised themselves as metamorphosed objects in the Island environment, giving me a totemic and clan identity. Bani interprets totemic and clan identity as "Walking Close with Mother Nature" [where] The

ancients not only sustained themselves physically in utilizing the energy from the land, sea and air, they too somehow experienced the spiritual consciousness [with] mother nature [for] survival” (E. Bani, *Torres News*, 1992).

Cultural connections through communication made possible the extensive traditional trade that traditional Torres Strait Islanders had with their trade partners, where the languages of others were engaged to link the three cultural groups. According to Bani (2002):

Torres Strait languages according to linguistics analysis are classified as Kala Lagaw Ya, the West Torres Strait language which identifies it with Cape York Aboriginal languages of Pama Nyungan Family and Meriam Mir the Eastern [Torres Strait] language is connected to PNG Fly River Delta regional languages (Cited in the *Torres News*, 2002).

This chapter is my interpretation of local Islander history. It is an effort to recover traditional interpretations of Islanders’ worldview to find the cultural expressions embedded in the customary teaching of telling and passing down of our history. This has been the method used by my people that encouraged me to take a part in cultural education. An example of traditional education is recorded here (Bani, 1992):

I’ve just got a small nature’s message here for you [in the Torres Strait] If ever you are awake in the early morning hours about 5 or 6 am you look to the eastern sky. This is commonly known as “The Seven Sister”, for further identification it looks like a bunch of grapes. This group of stars has been absent from our views for about 6 months, It’s here again and everyone will be able to see it in the night sky in September until its disappearance again in February [in the New Year]. Well, in Torres Strait this cluster of stars is called “USAL” or “eggs”. [Mother] nature is telling the turtles had started mating, beginning from Australia [mainland] coast to be gradually spreading to Torres Strait and eventually to Papua New Guinea. The turtles are now floating on the surface with well developed eggs; soon we will see flocks of Bee Eaters birds on their annual migration from Papua New Guinea to Australia. We (Islanders) call these birds “BIRU BIRU” the proclaimers of the seasons of the mating turtles “SAWLALAW THONAR”. (Cited in the *Torres News*, 1992: 13)

To eliminate my concerns in interpreting the “past horizons of history” I recognise, that, as Marcus and Fisher (1986, p. 31) have noted

The problem of interpretation is the same whether pursued through time or across cultures. Each historical period has its assumptions and prejudices, and the process of communication is engaging of the notions of one’s own period (or culture) with those of another. It is thus inevitable that the quality and content of understanding gained from the reading, say, Gregory of Tours, will be different from the ninth-century reader than for a twentieth-century one.

Torres Strait Islanders are taught to read the natural signs for survival. My Elders have taught me to read nature by observing the migration of certain birds, the wind and sea change, and the appropriate time to plant and harvest certain bush food. The passing down of culture through communication integrates traditional education with a history of customs and beliefs.

The Local History of Torres Strait Islanders and the Concept of Origin

The migration of Torres Strait Islanders to the Torres Strait, as recorded by Western sources, suggests the first settlers to the Torres Strait came from the Melanesian Islands, the southern coast of Papua New Guinea, and from the mainland of Australia (Flood 1983; Beckett 1987; Singe 1989; Holthouse 1976; Haddon 1935). Other academics who have written of Torres Strait come to a similar conclusion.²⁴ Their accounts do not record which Island in the Torres Strait was first settled by migration. However, Haddon reported that “There have been numerous cultural movements to Torres Strait from Daudai [New Guinea] and between Torres Strait Islands” (Haddon 1935, p. 412); and, according to Blainey:

The people of Cape York Peninsula were in touch with the Torres Strait Islands and with Papua; and of course Papua was part of the string of islands extending all the way to Southeast Asia. Where the Timor Sea was a wide barrier, Torres Strait was more like a land bridge (Blainey 1975, p. 104).

The descendants of traditional Islanders are unable to determine how long these Islands have been occupied and when asked about their presence, they refer themselves as being descended from ancestors who have lived on these Islands from time immemorial. However, the archaeological evidence for the pre-history of settlement in Torres Strait is beyond the scope of this thesis. According to Torres Strait Islanders, their relationship with their ancestors, who gave them their identity and how they account to each other in a clan/totemic system, is still acknowledged. Written sources (Haddon 1935; Beckett 1987; Sharp 1993) describe Torres Strait Islanders as seafarers who migrated to settle the Islands from other regions. However, in their oral history Islanders specifically link themselves to Torres Strait

²⁴ Blainey (1975, p. 15) hypothesised “The first Australians came across the stepping stones [Torres Strait] from south-east Asia during an epoch when the level of the ocean was lower. The sea-straits were narrow but the voyages were courageous. The slow eastward movement of these peoples was one of the great events in the history of man”.

when traditional issues are brought to bear on such post traditional debates over land and other social matters.

It has been argued that “the people of Torres Strait identify themselves as distinctly different from the Indigenous populations of the Australian mainland and Papua New Guinea” (Davis and Prescott 1992, p. 114). Torres Strait Islanders today acknowledge that past practices was governed by traditional chiefs and customary law within tribal boundaries of totemic clan groups. It is still recognised and practised in Torres Strait as exhibited by the Saibai Islanders. Singe who was interviewed by the *Torres News* 5 – 11 December, 2003 on his latest memoirs, “*My Island Home – a Torres Strait Memoir*” said “The Islanders have an amazing ability to absorb new ideas into their own world, while retaining a firm grasp on their traditions”. Moreover, the Saibai Islanders have rekindled their traditional trade with their coastal trading partner in Papua New Guinea in an exchange of traditional items for modern goods.

In writing of the geographic position of Torres Strait, referred to as “stepping stones” in an earlier dissertation (1998), I envisaged the Islands and the sea routes of Torres Strait as a “cultural crossroad” allowing infiltration of cultural traits and exchange evolved throughout the habitation of Torres Strait by Torres Strait Islanders. The focus on trading routes suggests a revolving trade of seagoing activities between the two larger Islands of Papua New Guinea and Australia using the Torres Strait people as an intermediary in the exchange of goods along the coastal regions. A notion of revolving trade supports the originality of time and space and cultural mutuality, which had evolved not as a recent activity but was practiced from times unknown.

Accordingly, traditional politics (customary law) accompanied these practices that evolved from the oral myths (traditional history) depicting the teachings of creator beings who gave traditional Islanders the arts and skills of traditional technology and social system. These myths and legends (local knowledge) are still represented in the traditional songs and dances of Torres Strait Islanders, which revitalise and preserve the oral history of an unwritten culture. Local knowledge formed a complex system of social divisions and tribal boundaries, the core of Islander’s living environment where cultural traits acquired from others supplemented the simplicity of life in accommodation with the surrounding ecosystem. Participation in trade between

Islands was seen as a means of social and cultural life with inter/intra island marriages, ceremonies and habits, strengthening cultural and economic ties and complementing group survival on Islands unsuitable for sustained use.

Overall, the Islanders' clan systems and cultural education are the basic components of Islanders' culture within a traditional environment. Traditional ownership is recounted in this interview of an Elder who talks about a time, in 1936, when certain Island leaders on community Island Councils resisted colonial laws in a move to regain cultural continuity:

S. W. Mimi Marou, he was the most senior and most vocal, and em e can tell you law traditional law laid down here, em e can tell you giz [grass roots family tree] blo dis man right through, em e can go and tell you all about dis, he was a man that like responsible for people. When he was chairman (Island Council) e always not act, e always go against law of Europeans, e even go against DNA [Department of Native Affairs] for implementing them things [administration policies]. (S. W. 2000, pers. comm., June)

In 1936, when all the Island Council members had gathered on Masig (York Is) for their inaugural council conference they replaced the old system of a post traditional authority, the Mamoose (headman or chief) of semi-indirect rule. However, to focus this chapter on the oral tradition of my people, I analyse their oral history for their views and interpretations of Islanders' history.

Oral History from an Islander Perspective

G.P. Oral history, our history that was given to us by our Elders, how important do you see oral history in the shaping of our Torres Strait Islander culture and how it guided us through from there till now?

S.M. Well oral history in the days of our forefathers is probably number one for them, but for us this new generation, this younger generation, its really robbing us because we've lost a lot of thing in not able to connect all those things that were spoken of the past to today's life, now I could understand and I supported oral history in the sense that those things belong to us, are belongs to us, and we own these things, and if we want somebody else to know about us, we the sole owner of those things, and we talk to people and we give them permission to come to know us, to know about us, and in that sense because we keep it very close to the chest oral history is good, but in that practise to retain that oral history, we have to whether we like it or not, we have to keep passing those things on and those things that we passed on got to be the right information, people have to take note and they have to have full concentration on those things, and there have to be the right information. And of course that is not always the case of when it come to people of today, you allow people to know certain things and then by the

time you realise it no longer becomes your things or be your history, it's claimed by other people, so oral history - come back to oral history, is that I support oral history to an extent where that responsibility lies on each individual or individual families. But then again when we speak to the generation of today, by taking things real steady we have to records all of those things and give permission for those things to be recorded, like we talking now so those things could be passed on to the next generation.

G.P. Uncle S. Those stories them Athe (grandfathers), them grandfather told us or them grandmothers told us, you think it provided us with a guideline for us of how we came into Western influence or it showed us the light, the pathway of how we see our Dreamtime story and them thing of how you see that before time them stories gave meaning to us and were of use?

S.M. Well them stories of ours, without them stories of ours we are nothing, I suppose when you talk about the white-man word story, them sometime people take that word story as a fairy tale, but story yarn belongs to you-me in our interpretation, blo you-me Torres Strait Islanders, if I tell you story this one yarn, it is a proper yarn what them grandfathers of ours told us and needs to be passed on. So when it comes to, and when a story teller tells a story, when it is told to our generation, we have to say to them old-people, grandfathers is this a proper story or this one is only used as example to put us on the right track, we have to ask them kind of question. Sometime he got story yarn, story that were told by our grandparents, only as an example to make our life come straight, and sometime them story yarn is a real dinky di thing that is happening on that particular day. So we have to have a clear explanation belong to them stories when it is told.

G.P. So in other words what I am saying there a gelar (traditional laws) belong to them things and every story have a law and in the old days and they followed that law?

S.M. Ho yes! Definitely, you and me got proper law, not gammon thing but proper law and them thing, those things that are passed on to us were told to us my understanding is that you - me e got separate law from white man which is law blo you-me, and then if I could just mention that many a time you-me talk about law to white-man, them-pla trap you-me by saying that well by asking you-me them question. Is it l - a - w, law or is it l - o - r - e, lore? You see you have to ask white-man all those things, because if we talk about law blo you-me, I'm talking about l-a-w, law blo you-me proper thing that you-me look towards to straighten lives blo you-me so that those things could be recorded, because its law blo you-me.

G.P. I am studying anthropology and how do you feel how other anthropologists has been doing works in the Torres Strait and past academics who have worked in the Torres Strait and have written history belong to Torres Strait?

S.M. Well, I will not mention a few names of them anthropologist, ----- who

have written a book about Torres Strait, and I know other people that have written things about Torres Strait, now immediately they write something and they are people who called themselves bosses of books and all that sort of things. Now I spoke to some of these people and people outside of them, anybody write things about Torres Strait Islanders and it's entirely up to Torres Strait Islanders to correct those things when we talk to people like that. Those people are also in the category of being anthropologists, now compare them people with you my boy, is that you Torres Strait Islander, when you-me talk we have an understanding not for you to please me but because you are a Torres Strait Island boy, all them pronunciation belongs to us, you also grow up with us and you savvy how to pronounce them word and of course pronunciation helps to spell words as we Torres Strait Islander spell it, and not how other people spelt it. So all those things need to be, you know like if you look at things that been written with us, good we can use them as a guide, but first it got to corrected in some ways, but when you-me Torres Strait Islanders people do things belong to you-me you know there are little correction, only small wrong not them proper big wrong where people he no understand, for those things that is recorded, many of those things needs to corrected by other people, but when we have someone from Torres Strait like you my boy, then I have little worry because we have an understanding between one Torres Strait Islander to another, even though I am older than you we have an understanding, but when it comes to another man they ran away and then all of a sudden you see a book is written and you know they held the copy rights of these things for themselves, that's how these things gets misused or taken away from us.

G.P. One more question about oral history from our side, Western historians how to do see them, how do they picture our culture and how they write about us like about the past?

S.M. Well there is a lot of wrong information, I'll give one example and this one has been quote from M. L. book and I mention M. L, and I say not to put down these people there was very good intention there, M. L. is an author and lot of the M. L. collections is now with John Oxley [Library] in Queensland and I am giving you an example of those misleading things or things that is not truly recorded in the messages that we give. Now in one of the stories that M. L. talks about in her books about Torres Strait Islanders, when she visited the Eastern Islands, don't forget in the group of the Torres Strait you know there are three groups of Islands, Eastern, Central and Western and when we go to Eastern Islands she talks Dogai [evil spirit]. Now Dogai, Eastern Islands don't talk about Dogai, you know when they talk about spirit; they talk about Lamar [ghost of a deceased]. So if you mix these kind of talk Dogai inside the Eastern group, you know you have to explain yourself why you do that in the Torres Strait about and that's where history has to be rewritten of what ever it mislead and people get mislead about them kind thing and if we don't question these things you know we will be chasing your tail at all times to correct them things, because them things belongs to you-me my boy, you know and that's where youngster like you is what you-me do now is sit-down and discuss those things and even if I make a mistake as an Elder for today, then I need to correct that with an Elder of

yesterday, you know an older person than me. So I have to be really careful to pass the right thing on you know. (S. M. 2000, pers. comm., May)

My interview with this elder is about interpretation of the Islander culture. What is relayed in this message is the positioning of insider-outsider perceptions of how Islanders interpret their history through the cultural differences in language and how the people of each of the Islands interpret their own history. It meant officially in the past, outsiders have depicted Torres Strait Islanders to be a part of Aboriginal Australia without due recognition of cultural distinction and difference as non-Islanders today who are learning to know Torres Strait culture and history.

Defining Oral Tradition - A Cross-Cultural Analysis

From a Western interpretation, oral tradition has been increasingly recognised by some scholars. As Vansina (1965, p. 1) explains:

In parts of the world inhabited by peoples without writings, oral tradition forms the main available source for the reconstruction of the past, and even among people who have writing, many historical sources, including the most ancient ones are based on oral tradition.

It is from a non-Indigenous standpoint that Vansina (1965, p. 49) wrote that “A varying degree of significance is attached to each tradition within a society in which it is handed down”. Sutton (1991, p. 254) argues that traditional accounts in Aboriginal Dreamtime do this saying “I think that myths go further than enshrining the status quo—they are also real speech situations, a code in which changes in the status quo are effected by the interlocutors and their audience” that both concepts on traditional and myths helps sort out the beliefs of Torres Strait Islanders’ stories of mythical creators, accepted as historical truth in Islanders’ cultural practices and religious teachings. From an insider’s point of view, the significance of oral history, the memorised events, is in the stories told by traditional authorities to explain the unwritten past that shaped the making of culture in traditional Torres Strait. These continue to have value for islanders.

According to Beckett, with the onset of modernisation there was continuity in the Murray Islands:

Their domain was based in their continuing commitment to the subsistence economy using the garden places, the beaches and reefs kept alive the myths

and stories associated with them. Gardening and fishing as their ancestors had done kept alive the meanings of these traditions. (1987, p. 112)

Haddon's assessment of the myths and legends of Torres Strait described these stories as mere "Folk Tales". Haddon later wrote "Further experience has confirmed me in the opinion that with ordinary care these tales may be accepted as trustworthy ethnographical documents", (1908, Vol. VI, p. 1). In particular, this was the case when Haddon analysed the complexity of culture connection to traditional trade.

It may be argued that Haddon's anthropological reports compiled in 1908 came from a limited number of interviews he conducted with selected Torres Strait Islanders. They were Islanders and non-Islanders who held colonial position of responsibilities and from the numerous second hand ethnographical reports and letters he received from the LMS, government teachers, and colonial administrators in Torres Strait when he returned to England. Contrary to Haddon's view, traditional consciousness gave Torres Strait Islanders an identity to appreciate the complexity of their existence. While present day Torres Strait Islanders are grateful for Haddon's records, giving Islanders the opportunity to read and recite the past customary practices of their ancestors, they remain critical of his method of understanding the accounts he recorded. This understanding of Haddon's ethnography of the myths and legends of Torres Strait is different to that of Nakata (1997, p. 190), who wrote his doctoral thesis on the Western knowledge systems and Torres Strait Islanders:

...However, a lot can be said about the cultivation of 'truths' from folk-tales. But the more important thing to analyse is Haddon's effort to compensate the absence of the historical literature akin to that, which underpins societies in the West. That is, he collected many folk-tales from the people in the Torres Strait in order to establish some ideas of their cultural make-up.

On Mer Island, the people there have valued Haddon's works, as acknowledged by one elderly informant about what he already knew, "*History was written when Haddon came to Murray Island and recorded our genealogy*" (M. S. 2000, pers. comm.). Others on Mer supported this view when questioned about the recorded genealogy, "*Yes! The families recorded here are people from their own village*" (M. G. 2000, pers. comm.).

Haddon saw the Islanders' world from his perspective as a social scientist and his literature was created to record what he understood to be the remnants of a

disappearing culture. It is different from the accounts of Christian missionaries whose Church misrepresented Islanders' culture and colonial authorities who suppressed Islander voices in their accounts through their official reports. Islanders today, when speaking about the region broadly, raise the presence of a commonly shared culture, Ailan Kustom' where the ethics of the church and colonial influence of representivity commands a significant responsibility for Islanders' daily affairs in Torres Strait. Thus, the adoption of the Christian culture complements the missionaries' reconstruction of Islander's ways within the framework of Christian beliefs and values. Sharp (1993, p. 100) examined the reports of colonial officials and missionaries gave her written evaluation:

For the London Missionary Society evangelists, the 'living God' was a terrible power manifest in Divine Wrath [The word of God] The 'Light' brought to the Islanders was the light to enlighten the Gentiles [and The Light] In the missionaries view, their arrival heralded the erasing of the old ways of 'heathen darkness'. The sacred emblems of that 'darkness', the masks and divinatory skulls, the sacred places and shrines were destroyed at the instigation of the missionaries.

Sharp presented an earlier description of the ideologies of colonial officials and quoted the Police Magistrate and Government Resident John Douglas report of 1895 thanking the LMS for their evangelistic mission amongst Torres Strait Islanders:

Dangerous and savage as the people of these Islands were, they are now perfectly harmless and friendly. Even at Saibai [Island] where not more than thirty years ago, the most confirmed skull hunters were in office, there has been a complete change of policy. For this we are chiefly indebted to the representatives of the London Missionary Society and at this present time it is not only perfectly safe for Europeans to land on that island, but they will be treated with kindness and hospitality (Douglas 1885). (cited in Sharp 1993, p. 27)

Sharp's summaries of colonial official reports and the work of missionaries outline the ethnocentric views of Westerners, showing how they perceive traditional people to be in their primal state. This classic account of reporting does not bring into focus the Islanders' culture of complex patterns of knowledge, their social behaviour and relationships with others. The outsiders' view broadly interprets the objectives of past ethnographers:

In its interest in holistic representation of other ways of life, ethnography has developed a particular (and from a literature standpoint, narrow) kind of realism, tied to the dominant historic narrative motifs in which it has been framed. Ethnographies as a genre had similarities with travellers and explorers accounts, in which the main narrative motif was the romantic

discovery by the writer of people and places unknown to the reader. (Marcus and Fisher 1986, p. 24)

The people of Torres Strait were represented as romantic subjects in the early literature and by examining local historical events from an anthropological perspective we can gain a more meaningful understanding of the colonial history of the Islands in contrast to the ‘myths and legends’ of the Islands that encompass a traditional history.

Cultural Symbols and Awareness

The traditional history of Torres Strait is the local history of the different groups of Islands. It includes the myths and legends of mythical beings such as Sidar, Gelam, Tagai, Bia, Karom the Lizard, Kwoiam and many others. These traditional stories connected the whole of the Torres Strait Islands in terms of cultural development, traditional technology and ecological landforms as mythical habitation sites. The cult heroes and culture bearers were the spiritual beings who introduced new survival skills and techniques and who introduced edible plant species to the Islands that accepted them. As told, their origins eventuated from the south coast of Papua New Guinea, Cape York and the surrounding Islands of Torres Strait that became the Islanders’ culture area. The creation myth of the Western Islands recorded by Haddon (1908) tells of “Yawar of Badu” (Badu Is) who tried repeatedly to teach the Badu people the art of horticulture but was chased away by the villagers and told to leave the Island. The consequence was resentment because when Yawar left he took with him the fertile soil and plant materials of bananas, coconuts, yams, taro, sugarcane and freshwater to Mer (Murray Is). Yawar settled on Mer when the Meriam accepted his knowledge of horticulture and, in general, the people of the Torres Strait have acknowledged Mer Island as the food basket of Torres Strait during traditional trade and exchange.

The traditional history of Torres Strait is embedded in ‘symbolism’ in the way it is interpreted and understood by Islanders. This concept does not apply solely to Torres Strait Islanders; broadly speaking it applies to the ‘traditional theories of knowledge’ that Elias (1991, p. 501) suggests has dominated Western society from the seventeenth to the end of the twentieth century. Elias hypothesised that “The symbol theory of knowledge is a spurt from the greater pre-eminence of fantasies to a change

in the balance towards greater reality – congruence”. According to the traditional beliefs of Torres Strait Islanders, Elias’s theory of “the human capacity of transmitting knowledge” (ibid) supports the Islanders’ concepts of beliefs as manifested in their myths and legends of interconnectedness as local knowledge through oral transmissions. This was done through languages, signs and symbolic gestures and passed on from one generation to another as the basic ingredients in the making of culture. Stressing the point, Elias stipulated that “In that respect there is no essential difference between Einstein’s famous formula symbolically identifying mass and energy, and the statement that the water in the kettle is boiling” (Elias 1991, p. 504). In relation to the Aboriginal concept of the Dreaming, according to Aboriginal culture:

There is no need to see the narrative details of [Aboriginal] myths simply as imagery, which is based on the psychology of childhood and dreams, and then applied to landscape in an arbitrary way. There is a strong argument for seeing site-related Aboriginal myths-and most of them are so related-not merely as invented pasts, but as in many cases a combination of invention and memory. (Sutton 1988, pp. 252-253).

Therefore, the mythology of Torres Strait Islanders may be well understood in terms of how Islanders identify and relate themselves to their natural surroundings to recount historical events of a common knowledge of origin. Vansina (1965, p. 102) made the point that “Not all societies have the same idea as to what historical truth is. It is an idea which influences traditions, because they must be true, and everything which is not true must be kept out of the hearsay testimonies of the chain of transmission”. It is within this framework that the oral history of Islanders is told purposely by traditional authorities to transmit the positive and negative aspects of life to their subordinates. Vansina (1965, p. 12) argues:

Oral traditions have no historical content, but are simply myths invented to the demands of a particular-and usually political-situation. Their existence is thus entirely due to their function [where] the study of oral tradition has a bearing in the field of customary law, not in that of history.

We need to understand these in their appropriate cultural contexts. I take the position of Keesing (1985, p. 106) as showing that “Belief systems, bodies of myth, and ritual sequences all have histories in time and space” and the accounts of oral history presented here encapsulate an era of time and space in the passing of Islanders’ history.

Mythology or Historical Truth

According to the myth of Sidar, he manifested himself amongst all the inhabited Islands of the Torres Strait prior to the intervention of colonial administration. Sidar was regarded by the Mer Islanders as the source of their local economy at locations on their Island through his mythical travels. Across Torres Strait, Island elders through their stories of Sidar, have accounted for the numerous plant foods that exist there making them sites of significance where he left his imprints and the different language groups of Islands relate a different version of Sidar's activities. The Islanders' traditional borders were marked out by the ancestral beings metamorphosed in the surrounding sites; on local/offshore reefs, coral cays, small islands, the metamorphosed offshore rocks and land formations include the interpretations in the fresh water springs, waterholes, edible seafood and vegetation. Oral teachings of all this knowledge allowed Torres Strait Islanders to appreciate their origins in more specific terms, their traditional sea (land) boundaries in ways similar to those described by Sutton when he referred to Aboriginal Dreaming as "Story Places and History Places respectively" (1988, pp. 251-258).

From the village of Ulag on Mer (Murray Is) a most senior elder provided me with an oral account of Sidar who travelled from New Guinea bearing gifts into Torres Strait and the Mer Islanders accepted him. The Elder told his version in Torres Strait Creole and I have transcribed it in the way I write the language of my people in Torres Strait Creole:

The Legend of Sidar

Sidar, em e kum prom Nugene [New Guinea] lontime e go. Em e pas kum ya Dauar-em, sort time em e stup dare, em e plant-e naice [one] tree aptar em e kum Mer-ge (Murray Is), em e kum and stup ya lo Umar, em e gud friend dare name Kobai. Kobai e spik-em for naice (one) debe nauer [good looking girl], name-le, Pekari em e stup lo Ulag billiz [east side of Mer]. Morning time [the next day], Kobai te-ke Sidar go por luk dis gel, [Pekari] but halfway now, Sidar e luk al nader oman and em e humbuk [sexual intercourse] dhempla. Pas om-anand em e humbuk, em e planem kaba [banana], Teker ge apta now demto [Sidar and Gobai] gor por Eger. Lo Eger Sidar e like nadar oman, name blo em e, Pai-zap, lo Eger, Sidar palnem more kaba [banana trees], apta dis demto.[Sidar and Gobai] gor now por Warwe. Lo Warwe, e stup dis au-le [old man] Soroi, ana nauer werem [daughter] blo em, Zabker. Zabker e nor b gad man [a virgin], wen Sidar e bin humbuk em au-ka mitkar blood, dis place now zogo [sacred],

den prom de, demto [Sidar and Kobai] gor Areb, den Las ana Mei, prom de Sidar ana Gobai gor bi-gen Ulag. One place, Lewag, dis place all makrem [young men] e dunce por kesem Pekari, but Pekari nor like dhempla, when em be look Sidar em e wande Sidar one time. Lim esemuda [sundown], nitetime e kum Sidar teke Pekari go sanbis [beach], demto e humbuk, Sidar e tekmout lu blo em ana capsite [semen] outside, aptar morning time all dem Ulag people e luk all koknut [coconuts] tree e b graw. Same morning Sidar gor round ailan someway Er village, em e look Kos ana Abob demto e kesem tup [sardines], Sidar e yarn for demto, plenty sardine nader place, demto e go, Sidar go luk Kudar mother, blo Kos ana Abob ana tryem por humbug. Kudar nor like em, Sidar now e killi-em [Kudar] and put em inside bozepei [basket woven from coconut fronds] and carr-em go. When Kos and Abob e kum bike, demto kan pinaei mother blo demto den dey luk trike blo Sidar and cheseem. Kudar e call out for Kos ana Abob, prom inside basket por elpe em, den dhem two boys chasem Sidar, now Sidar e luk demto kum kare sap stik por killi-em, Sidar now grab-em feather blo waumer [frigate bird] and stik em lor bike [back] and den he ply up and up. Kos ana Abob kan kesem, Sidar den kare Kudar go up and up, den e drop-em [Kudar] down outside sal-wartar [sea], Kudar e drown an prom de Kudar e turn kum por big reef, e name Hom, plenty lar [fish], kaier [crayfish], nazir [trochus shell] ana paswa [giant clam shells]. Sidar em e go Bramaki [Bramble Cay] em e leave more shells de, apta em e go bike gen Nugene [New Guinea] nor kum by-gen". (S. G. 2000, pers. comm., June)

The story of Sidar has been recorded and translated by Haddon (1908) who had the opportunity to interview several informants during his research in the eastern Torres Strait. Haddon writes:

Sida came in a canoe from Daudai [New Guinea] to the Murray Islands. At Dauar he planted a screw pine; wherever he went on Mer, he planted bananas or screw pines after having had connection with different women, most of who are represented by worked stones. At one spot he defecated many shells which accounts for their abundance on the adjacent reef. He went to see the beautiful Pakari before whom the young men of the island were dancing, Pekari and Sida slept together and coconuts first appeared as the result of seminal emission. Sida met Abob and Kos and sent them on a fool's errand to catch fish while he made unavailing overtures to their mother, then he stabbed her in the neck and put her in his basket; Abob and Kos followed Sida who flew into the air and with the aid of some feathers of the frigate bird and they attacked him, Sida threw the mother into the sea and there resulted a reef rich in fish. Sida planted cone shells on certain sand-banks where they are still abundant and finally flew back to New Guinea. (Haddon, 1908, p. 59)

In contrast, Western Islanders have a different version of Sidar who is said to have come from the southern Papua New Guinean coast in the form of a frigate bird, found in the tropics and that haunts the seas of the Torres Strait. Sidar changed into a human wherever he landed on the Islands and introduced the basic resources for

survival to the people. The mythical deeds of Sidar, according to Islanders, were gifts accepted into Islander society, as when Sidar introduced into the various clan groups, new cultural traits and traditional responsibility for religious rituals and site maintenance of certain areas. However, with the arrival of foreign influences, the force of these responsibilities and cultural traits was diminished by Christian theologies and education. The populations on the smaller Islands were removed by colonial administration and were relocated into a system of communal mission villages on the larger populated Islands, thus diminishing the Islanders' traditional responsibilities in the upkeep of customary obligations.

The Mythological Accounts of Gelam

The oral and cultural teaching by my Elders²⁵ has enabled me to contribute the oral history, the Legend of Gelam, whose role is regarded by Islanders as a provider and creator of the sea (land) environment in the Torres Strait. Gelam's mythical course of travel has played an important part in the social and economic lifestyle of Torres Strait Islanders by identifying the sea routes associated with traditional trade.

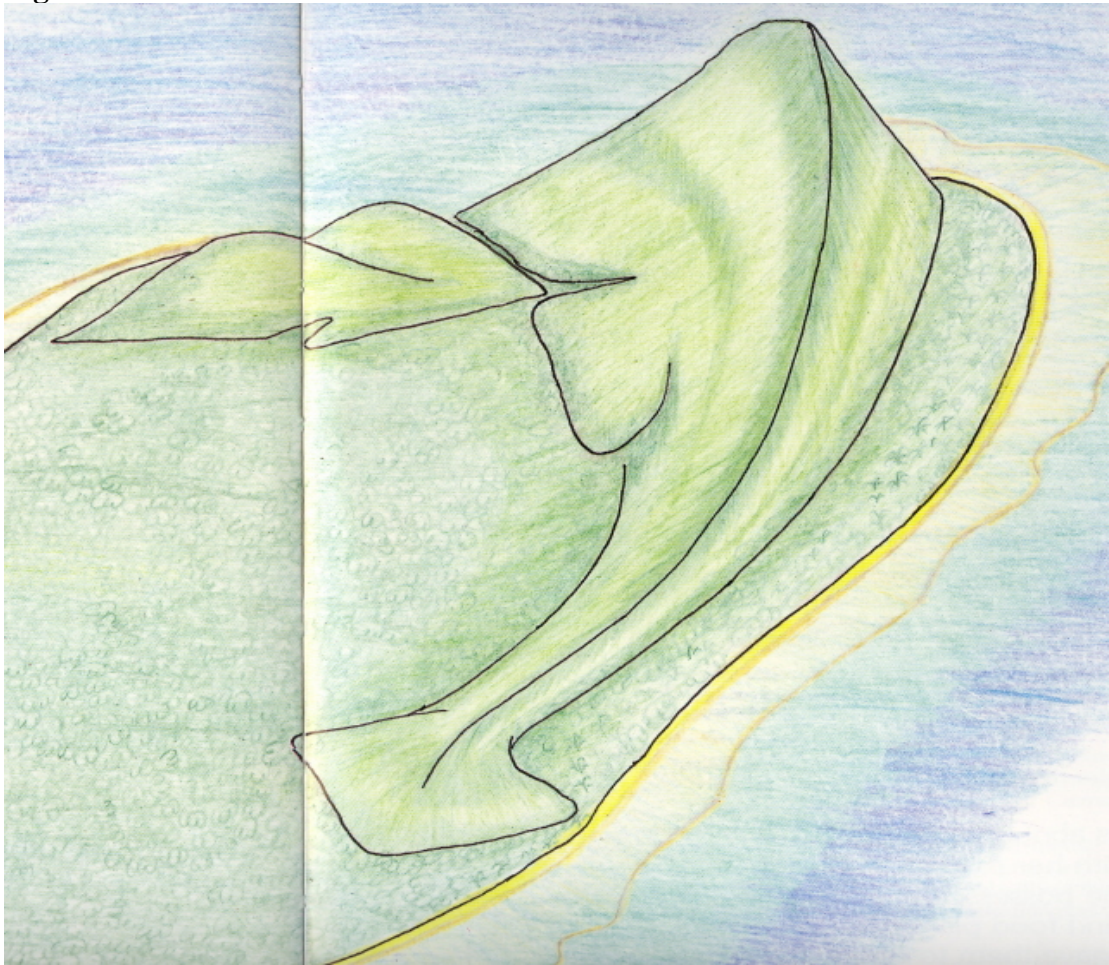
I submit the following testimony of oral historical truth according to my Elders. Oral history has culturally embedded in my consciousness the mythical journey of Gelam, a super-natural being who came in the form of a dugong (Pitt 1998), from the Western Island of Moa to the small Island of Mer (Murray Is). The story of Gelam is a version from the Eastern Torres Strait groups of Islands, Mer (Murray Is), Erub (Darnley Is) and Ugar (Stephen Is) as it retrace the mythical course of his travel.

The Legend of Gelam

Gelam as a youth lived with his mother, Atwer, at a site known as Bulbul on Moa (Banks Is). They were the only two who resided there, when the rest of villagers had fled the Island, because of the arrival of Lamar (an evil spirit from a deceased in human form). One day Gelam's mother made him a bow and arrows and told him to go to the forest and hunt Gainau (Torres Strait pigeon). Every day this was the task that Gelam did to bring home fresh meat and every time he brought Gainau(s) home,

²⁵ According to Abednego Gela (1993) who published "*Gelam The Man from Moa*": "There are many versions to the legend of Gelam. This one (her story) was told to me [in her book] at the age of nine by my mother's relatives Aka [grandmother] Urga and Aunty Zenna of Kubin Village, Moa Island, Western Torres Strait" (Abednego Gela 1993, p. 1).

Figure 16: Gelam



(Abednego-Gela 1993, pp.72- 73)

This illustration by Abednego Gela depicts how Gelam, in the form of a dugong has metamorphosed into a significant feature to outline a major site of significance “...after finding a comfortable position on the sandbar Gelam buried himself on Mer and became a very large hill in the shape of a giant dugong and there he remains to this day”. (Abednego Gela 1993, pp. 72-73)

Gelam would divide the share by giving the lean birds to his mother, after he ate the plump ones at his bush hideout. Gelam continued this selfishness until his mother found out she was given onnly lean pigeons to eat, and Gelam was often not hungry to share in the meal. Atwer decided to punish him through a scheme which she planned, and on the day when Gelam was on his hunting trip, his mother dressed and decorated herself in white clay and mud to represent a Lamar (evil spirit) and went into the forest to Gelam’s hunting hideout. It was in the afternoon and Gelam saw the Lamar coming through the forest and fled home through thick scrubs. The razor vines cut Gelam so badly that when he arrived home his mother was there after taking a shorter route and had already washed off her disguise in a nearby stream.

She asked him what had happened and was told of the Lamar incident. Atwer attended to Gelam's wounds and rested him. On the following days, Gelam carried on with his hunting spree, only to be troubled by the Lamar again and again. At home one evening, Gelam noticed traces of clay behind her mother's ear and knew that it was his mother who had disguised herself as the Lamar, and he thought of a scheme to desert his mother for another place. The next day he told his mother he was going hunting but instead Gelam went deep into the forest in search of a suitable tree to make himself a life-size dugong for his getaway. His selection of the first tree that he cut down was a kaper-kaper tree²⁶ (light weight wood) and he shaped it into a dugong and took it to sea. He found the wood to be too light as it floated on the surface instead of submerging. Gelam told his first dugong to go to the Island of Mabuiag (Jervis Is) to the northwest and he went home. The second day Gelam cut down a wild cotton tree and carved his second dugong, and took it to sea. He found the wood submersible but was not suitable for his purpose. He told his second dugong to go the Island of Badu, west of Moa and went home. The following day Gelam found and cut down a tulu, (a black wood tree) and carved his third dugong and took it to sea. He found the wood too heavy as it sank to the seabed when he entered into it. Gelam told this dugong to go south to the mainland coast (Cape York, Australia) and he went home.

During the night, in his sleep, Gelam's long dead father came to him in a dream and told him where to find the right tree, that he must tap the tree for a certain sound and to take note of the nesting tree dwellers, small black birds who will chirp for you when you have found the right wood. The next day he followed what his father's dream had instructed of him and went seeking out the timber until he cut down a heavy black wood indicated to him by the chirping black birds and carved it into a dugong. He took it to sea and was at once pleased with the performance that suited his very need. His carved replica performed the natural habit of the dugong; being able to dive deep and ascend to the surface for fresh air. Back on shore Gelam gathered the best soil, wild fruits and vegetables and every seed he could find and

²⁶ The Kaper-kaper tree has been used to make traditional ornaments and similar to the Balsa wood it is carved by Islanders to make model outrigger canoes for display and sailing competitions in the eastern Island group on Erub (Darnley Is). Erubians display their skills against others in sailing these models at low tides during favourable wind condition. In my youth, I participated in such events during my stay on Erub.

placed it well into the dugong's hollowed out body. He had enough food for his long journey across the Torres Strait from west to east. Gelam then hid his dugong and went home to have supper with his mother. During this time Gelam told her that if she found or saw a very large fish when she is out fishing, she had to let him know so he could spear it and Gelam retired for the night. In the morning, his mother Atwer went fishing while the tide was low, exposing the submerged reefs. She took her fishing basket and a sharp pointed stick. On shore, Gelam watched his mother until she reached the most outer reefs, and then went to where he hid his dugong and dragged it out to sea and entered into the hollowed body, which turned into a live sea mammal that dived to deeper water and he viewed his mother from afar. Gelam was now a dugong and swam towards his mother who saw the mammal, and shouting in excitement in seeing such a large fish. She called to her son on shore, but Gelam never came and Atwer tried in vain to reach and spear the large fish with her sharp pointed stick but the dugong swam out of her reach. Then Gelam stood out from his dugong and told Atwer it was him and that he was leaving Moa Island and her. He told his mother that it was her disguised as the Lamar who frightened and chased him and the place where he is going, she will never see or find him. Gelam told his mother he was sorry for what he had done. Gelam then retracted into the dugong and dived deep and swam away from his mother. Atwer cried her heart out, begging her son to come back, but Gelam ignored her cries and kept diving and swimming on an easterly direction to Naghir (Mt Earnest), but this place was too close to Moa. From Naghir, Gelam looked back and still saw his mother standing at the same fishing spot at Moa, and knew that this Island was too close to his mother and she would be able to visit him almost anytime she pleased. Gelam then changed course to north and diving deep swam to Iama (Yam Is), and this place was too close to his mother. So he rested on Iama and the next day he made course for Sasi after leaving some vegetables and fruit seed and a bit of soil on Iama. The Islands that Gelam set his foot upon after leaving Sasi are: Poruma (Coconut Is), Masig (Yorke Is), Aurid (Skull Is)²⁷, Ugar (Stephen Is), Erub (Darnley Is), before finally reaching his destination on the small sandy island of Mer (Murray Is). During his journey, Gelam performed the same ritual by introducing seeds and vegetable plants and by adding a bit of the

²⁷ The people of Aureed, renamed Skull Island by European mariners was classic news in 1835 when castaway remains of the *Charles Eaton* was found by Capt Lewis of the Sydney-based ship, the *Isbella* (Holthouse 1976, p. 38).

fertile soil from Moa to these Islands. It is told that when Gelam arrived at Erub (Darnley Is), he ascended the high hill named Lalawa and looked south west towards Moa, and caught a faint glimpse of his mother, Atwer who was still standing there, crying and looking out for her son. Gelam then looked east and saw the tiny island of Mer and knew that this would be his new home and resting place. Gelam rested the night and the next day performed the ritual of introducing fertile soil, seeds and vegetation to Erub and departed for Mer. On his arrival at Mer, Gelam looked towards his mother and could not see her or Moa Island from this distance and so finally committed himself to make Mer his home. According to my mother's clan group, Mer was a flat sandy island with few trees and Gelam laid himself against the westerly side of Mer by facing northwest. The north-westerly wind, Naiger was now blowing fiercely by throwing fine beach sand into the nostrils of Gelam. The sand annoyed him so much he moved and changed direction to lie south west, and scattered all the fertile soil, the fruit seeds and vegetables amongst the local vegetation with his left hand and in doing so, sneezed two small red seeds from his nostrils that became the Islands of Dauar and Waier. His movements on the flat surface of Mer pushed up the hills and Gelam now firmly placed and fixed himself in this position protected from the fierce winds of Sager, the south easterlies and metamorphosed into the very high hill of Gelam, an extension to the formation of Mer (Murray Island). Gelam's mother, Atwer was so broken hearted over the departure of his son that she too turned to stone that is still visible today. It is said that when the tide comes in and submerges her, the people of Moa still say that Atwer (the rock) can still be seen crying at low tide, where fresh water trickles from her eyes that is represented by two holes at the top of the rock. In Lawrie's (1972, p. 6) version of the story told to her by Mer Islanders:

Later on, when sharks attacked the small island of Peibri – she lived to the east of Gelam on the small reef called Mebgor – she left her home and came to rest beside Gelam. Mer was a small island once, but Gelam came, and then Peibri, to make her big and strong and rich.

The legend of Gelam according to the people of Torres Strait relates Gelam as the creator of the dugong who introduced three types of dugong to the waters of Torres Strait, identifiable by their colouring. Torres Strait Islanders had acknowledged these marine mammals from dark brown (black dugong), brown (brown dugong) and light brown (white dugong). These sea mammals are hunted by Torres Strait Islanders for

their meat and high oil content for medicinal properties. Surplus dugong meat and oil was used as a trade item for other goods. To the people of Mer, the Islands of Dauar and Waier was created by Gelam when he sneezed from his nostrils two red seeds. From his left nostril, one seed became Waier and the seed from his right nostril became Dauar. The three Islands, Mer, Dauar and Waier are noted rookeries for nesting green sea turtles and on Dauar, traditional priests prior to contact with the missionaries practised the sacred turtle ceremony, the Nam (Turtle) Zogo in thanksgiving to the ancients for the gifts of seafood. To the present time, the once sacred hill of Gelam on Mer is a legend in the minds of Torres Strait Islanders. Modern developments and adaptation to the European way of life on Mer have seen the gradual destruction of this site (see Figures 16 and 17).

Figure 17 Gelam (Mer Island)



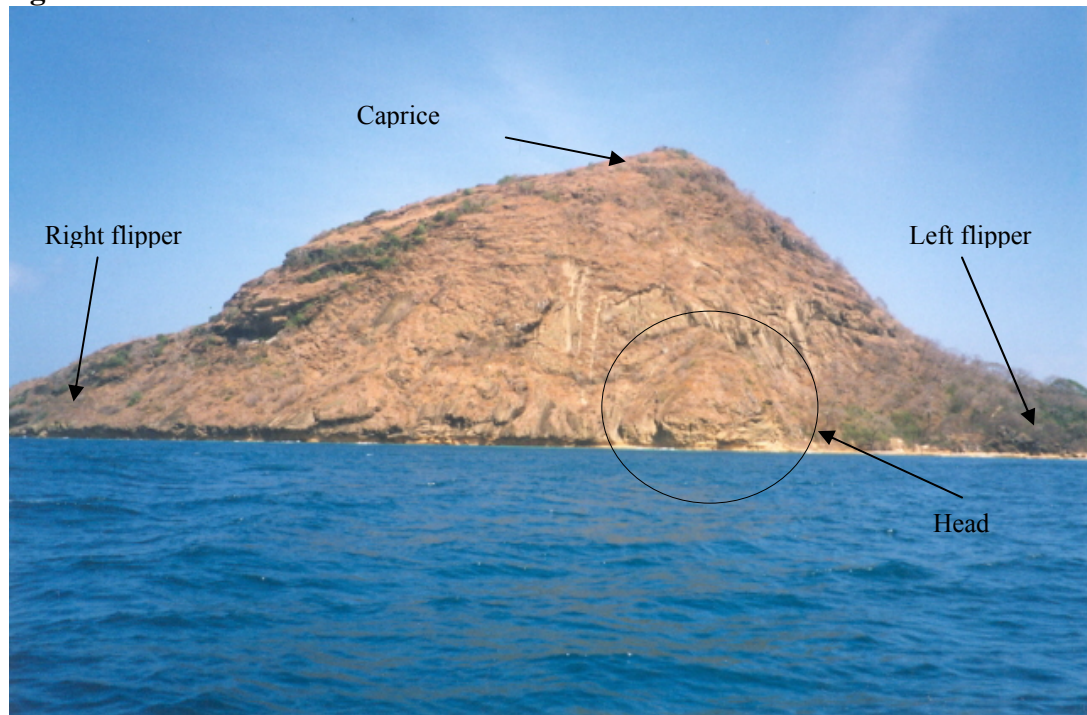
Photograph by George Pitt

This photograph of Mer Island reflects the outline and shape of Gelam the dugong. From the right our people can identify his nostrils, leading to the top of his head and eye, then his right flipper (curve), leading down to his fluke (tail). This is Gelam, my ancestor and totem. This photograph was taken in 2000 during my research on Mer Island.

According to the legend, the Island of Dauar was created from one of the red seeds Gelam sneezed from his right nostril. Dauar reflects one of the many mythical deeds of Gelam during his sea journey from west to east through the marine environment of the Islanders' culture area, Torres Strait. Thus, viewing Dauar from a traditional perspective, I have related the hill of Dauar to represent the green sea turtle. The high hill of Dauar is its carapace. From bottom right and left at the base of the hill, these land points appears to me as its flippers and central to the base of this hill there is a land point depicting its head. My ancestors, the ancients, once practised the sacred turtle ceremony, the Nam (Turtle) Zogo on Dauar Island, a thanksgiving ceremony to appease the spirits in times of plenty. The three Islands of Mer; Dauar, Waier and Mer provides the people of Mer with a sustainable seasonal harvest of green sea turtles and their eggs. It one of the main traditional diet for ceremonies, feasts and

for domestic use as well as the consumption of other sea animals such as dugong, fish, and marine crustaceans.

Figure 18: Dauar Island



Photograph by George Pitt

The Legend of Kuiam

The legend of Kuiam is a story that connects the culture area of traditional Torres Strait in particular with the people of Mabuiag (Jervis Is) one of the western Islands with the Aboriginal people from northern north Queensland. It links the trade and exchange of rituals and practices among the people of Cape York, Torres Strait and southern New Guinea. This legend is told by the people of Mabuiag (Jervis Is) who bond this legend with the Aboriginal Dreamtime of Cape York Peninsula. The legend tells of Kuiam, the son of an Aboriginal tribal sorcerer from Western Cape York and his mother who came from the Island of Mabuiag. My grandparents would point out the blended values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as they passed this story to me. The Cape York people claimed that Kuiam's father was the first to introduce the edible native fruit, the wongai²⁸ by introducing it from seeds to the Western Islands when he made his warring raid on the people of Torres Strait and

²⁸ The Wongai is an edible native plum to Torres Strait. Its sustainable use as food is highly nutritional and is used in cooking, preserved by sun dried, or eaten fresh when ripe.

New Guinea (Singe 1989, p. 3).

According to the people of Mabuiag, Kuiam came from the Cape York region and was described as a warrior cult hero who fought many battles with the opposition Islands. He was protected by the powers of a pair of very sacred crescent shaped half moon shaped objects made from the carapace of the hawksbill turtle. The sacred objects were hung as a necklace, one from his chest, and the other on his back which he wore around his neck. Known to the Western Islanders as “Kutibu” and “Giribu”, the pair of crescent shaped objects was termed as Augad (Gods) in the Western Island dialect. It is told that Kuiam battled with the Western Group of Islands: Moa, Badu, Yam, Saibai, Dauan and Boigu and as far as the Papua New Guinea coast (Haddon 1935, Vol. 1, p. 383).

It is said that Kuiam had taken many heads as trophies, and that he was later killed in a revenge attack by the Badu and Moa people at night, as he slept without the protection of his discarded Augad (Gods) at Mabuiag. Before his death, Kuiam’s deeds created the many reefs found in the waters of Western Torres Strait, and introduced fire to various Islands and he made a permanent fresh water spring where he threw his spear in the creek bed at Mabuiag. Apart from the traditional transmission of Islanders, outsiders have also recorded the story of Kuiam. Part of this story is extracted from the ethnography of Raven-Hart, (1949, p. 157) who travelled the Islands of Torres Strait in the 1940s and recorded the people and their history. During his visit to Mabuiag, Raven-Hart quotes his guide and informant who told him:

Kuiam live here - you know Kuiam? Yes, he live here; and his cemetery - where he buried, I mean - that up on that hill, and many Bu shells all around. You want I show you? But hard walk that! And that creek, he make it: no creek there, but one time he his throw his spear from that point - down there, near where you live - right over here, and where that spear go in ground that creek come. And he get water: my sons show you, and that stone where he make his first spear straight - you know, if bamboo not straight then fish-spear fly no good, and best you make stone hot, put fire on stone and make it hot, and then take away fire and rub bamboo on stone and that make it straight. (1949, p. 57)

I was taught the traditional way of making fish spear by my elders, similar to the method introduced by Kuiam. Fire is used to heat green shafts of bamboo or wood which is placed over a small boulder and the heated shaft is pressed by both hands in

ways to make the shaft straight. This is done a number of times until the shaft takes shape and when it is straight, a spear is made from the shaft by adding prongs from tempered hard wood or by the contemporary substitute, iron.

Kuiam is acknowledged as the warrior hero of Mabuiag, an Island whose composition is mainly granitic, and producing most by leached soil unsuitable for sustainable agricultural production (Beckett 1987; Sharp 1993; Singe 1989; Pitt 1998). Kuiam's skills made Mabuiag Islanders skilful hunters who are dependent on the seafood of dugongs and turtles, and would trade surplus meat for fruit and vegetables from neighbouring Islands. The deeds of Kuiam added prestige, traditional trade in surplus dugong meat and respect for the people of Torres Strait, notably for Mabuiag Islanders' skills in hunting large sea mammals. According to Haddon, from his recording of Namoa, the Chief of Mabuiag:

The fame of Kwoiam [Kuiam] caused the name of Mabuiag to be feared [a warrior tribe and hunters] for many a long day, and though the Island was rocky and comparatively infertile, Kwoiam covered it with honour and glory, thus showing how the deeds of a single man glorify a place in itself of little worth. (Haddon, 1904, Vol. V, p. 83)

Accordingly, the mythical deeds of Kuiam are held in high esteem by Mabuiag Islanders, and Torres Strait Islanders have always respected and acknowledged the people of Mabuiag as dugong hunters. Historians and ethnographers who have written accounts of the cult heroes from the past, generalised have tended to treat oral history as *mere* stories. These writers have not contemplated the deep cultural meanings of how Mabuiag Islanders interpret their history.

Interpreting Oral Tradition and Culture

The interpretations of oral history from an Islander perspective is my way of communicating to others how to understand and view local perceptions in the stories that are deeply embedded in the making of Islander culture and tradition. I have pictured it to be the centre of the life-ways of Torres Strait Islanders from which a centralised and decentralised vast network of cultural connection through traditional trade extending far out of Torres Strait. (See Figure: 19 and 20). The stories have affixed Islanders' beliefs in their ancestors and relate to them as traditional knowledge from which evolved customary laws of dealing with your neighbours and respecting taboos. This knowledge gave Torres Strait Islanders the skills to hunt

large sea-mammals, how to grow various foods by seasonal reckoning, ceremonies and rituals as part of social control in traditional government and economy, linkages through kinship and cultural ties, a trade route that connects the four corners of the Strait, to include parts of the west and east coasts of Queensland on mainland starting at Cape York extending south and north to the coastline villages of southern Papua-New Guinea. Whereas in regards to cultural connections, the Saltwater Dreaming of the Aboriginal people on the east and west coast of Queensland make mention of Chivaree, the Seagull, one of the great ancestors who came from the Torres Strait:

In Queensland Giroo Gurrll, part man and part eel, rose out of the water near Hinchinbrook Island and named the animals, birds, and all the places there, while the great Ancestor Chivaree the Seagull paddled his canoe from the Torres Strait Islands down the western coast of Cape York to Sandy Beach where his canoe turned to stone.” (Flood 1983, p. 29)

In Torres Strait, the western Torres Strait Islanders, especially Badu Islanders, make their connection to the legend of Chivaree the Seagull and traditional instructions from Elders reflect its ancestral importance: *“You mus nor killem Keke (Seagull) because sumting bad or bad luck you gor gedem - if you hungry you kill, if nor hungry nor killem”* (M. N. 2000, pers. comm., November). The traditional advice meant showing respect to ancestors who are manifested in the natural wildlife and that the killing of any animals other than for food is a taboo. Cultural connection, according to Haddon who had made similar claims on the cultural and economic exchange between Torres Strait Islanders and the southern Aborigines, was that, “in the Cape York Peninsula [it] demonstrate[s] that reciprocal influence has taken place between these two areas” (1935, p. 266). Thus, the significance of the myths and legends of Torres Strait symbolically maintain that Islander culture was not static but dynamically driven to follow the pattern of cultural exchange between Islanders and their trade partners along the story-lines of the legacy left behind by the creator beings. According to my Islander cultural beliefs, stories such as the myths and legends of Torres Strait handed down throughout the generation of Islanders had its purpose. To the people of Torres Strait this contributed knowledge to the development of traditional practises, the accumulation of cultural materials, so as to maintain and control cultural development.

Geographically, the Torres Strait culture area is bounded by two major Islands of Op Daudai and Keo Daudai (Papua New Guinea and Australia). The Islanders’ intra

tribal warfare between the two groups is well recorded, including inter Island raiding war parties. However, oral history is skilfully positioned and transmitted for the purpose of harmony and cohesiveness, that Islanders' myths and legends have socially and politically connected these groups by kinship bonds through marriages, trade and alliances²⁹, exchange of gifts and ideas. These stories, when culturally interpreted, showed that cultural ties of dependency between these groups accounts for by the scale of trading activities of a greater social harmony and social exchange in traditional times, prior to the intrusion of contemporary inducements. According to Sharp:

The myths had brought to the sea people [Torres Strait Islanders] diverse gifts: their similarities made possible their common life-ways and customs; their dissimilarities impelled them to seek an associative, complementary unit. Through the imperatives of the necessities they lacked they created a network of peace. The Islanders went to Op Deudai (Daudai) above all for canoes. The myths which brought them together by turning round the danger of the wild into a named world made voyages possible across storm prone waters. The voyagers travelled the safe tracks of the mythical heroes. Over time, the wisdom of their experience was further distilled in extension of their-myths, so enabling the networks of exchange to be enlarged. (1993, p. 33)

Taking into account the notion of the exchange of gifts in Indigenous societies, Sahlins (1972) provides a broad sense of its basic principles as “an economics properly anthropological” by his judgment “That every exchange, as embodies some coefficient of sociability, cannot be understood in material terms apart from its social terms”. He analysed on the spirit of the gift:

...*The Gift* is, I think, even broader than external relations and transaction. In posing the internal fragility of the segmentary societies, their constituted decomposition, *The Gift* transposes the classic alternatives of war and trade from the periphery to the very centre of social life, and from the occasional episode to the continual presence. All exchanges, that is to say, must bear in their material designs some political burden of reconciliation (Sahlins 1972, p. 182).

The concept of *The Gift* brings into context the ceremonial exchange of the Wauri³⁰ shell, a gift of reciprocity by Sidar which had special meaning to the Eastern Islanders and their trade partners on the south coast of Papua New Guinea. The shell

²⁹ According to Lawrence (1991, p. 2), “Customary exchange may be defined as the ‘reciprocal traffic’, exchange or movements of goods. The exchange encompasses diversity of activities and process: the change of ownership of women, services, songs, dances and rituals.”

³⁰ The scientific name for the Wauri shell is “*conus litteratus*, var. *millepunctatus*”. (Sharp 1993, p. 28)

itself became special purpose money that would move products between Torres Strait and Papua New Guinea and into other areas in the Pacific. As an example, the traditional value of the Wauri was as an item for trade, such that the coastal trader of Papua New Guinea who had acquired it from Eastern Torres Strait would exchange or purchase goods from other trading partners on the periphery of the Islander culture area. These trade partners would then extend their exchange relationships with other partners. Traditionally the value of the Wauri shell as special purpose money in relation to specialisation as a trade item, it has functioned similarly to the Kula Ring activity of the Trobriand Islanders. As an example to technical knowledge and specialisation of the Kula Ring trade of the Trobriand Islanders, Kottak (1991) summaries that:

Craft specialisation reflects the social and political environment rather than the natural environment. Such specialisation promotes trade, which is the first step in creating alliance with enemy villages....Specialisation contributes to keeping the peace, although it has not prevented intervillage warfare....We don't know why this specialisation begun, but we do know that it persisted within the kula ring, which allied several communities and islands in a common trade network. (1991, p. 264)

We can visualise the Kula Ring concept with the oral history of Torres Strait fitting largely into context as a metaphor of social understanding. In contrast, the Wauri shell and other marine goods from Torres Strait became a source for trade and communication in the expansion of a network of trade organisations connecting Torres Strait Islanders to the coastal people in the south and then to the northern highlanders of Papua-New Guinea. Academic sources have identified that Torres Strait Islanders traded and exchanged with their neighbouring partners to the north and south of their culture area in specialised products of traditional economy. As such, the evidence supports an argument that a much wider expansion of trade existed between Torres Strait, Op Daudai (Papua New Guinea) and Keo Daudai (Australia). In reference, Hughes (1973) a geographer in his study of *The Stone-Age Trade in the New Guinea Inland* found:

Trading was aided by the institutionalising of certain aspects: the commercial use of kinsman, the establishment and maintenance of trade friends, the ritualising of behaviour appropriate to trade, the extending of credit by the acceptance of delayed payments, the recognised use of minor shell valuables as a medium of exchange for many transaction. The investigation drew an arbitrary boundary around a large section of the central highlands it was found to be covered by a network of trade routes which the presence of marine shells showed, extended from coast to coast. The network itself was created by and

built up of the interlocking and overlapping personal trading networks of individual men. Trade within the study area was one large segment of a web of trade that covered every part of the mainland of New Guinea, extended to the Bismarck Archipelago to all offshore islands, to Australia and to Asia. (1973, pp. 118- 121)

Hughes made his study at a time when modern goods and European contacts had already penetrated and influenced the hinterland and coastal villages of Papua New Guinea. From his observations wrote, “Here, it is possible only to state briefly the methods, to outline the distribution of resources and the environmental and cultural diversity that underline the rationale of indigenous trade” (Hughes 1973, p. 97) Trade items (Lawrence 1991, Moore 1989) between Torres Strait Islanders and their trade partners were: sea food, mats, wooden harpoons and animal bone spear barbs, bows and arrows, canoe hulls, shells, human skulls, feathers, turtle shells, coconut fibred ropes, spears and woomeras, artefacts, fibred-woven sails, ochre, coconut and dugong oils, dried salted fish, dried turtle and dugong meat, fish oil, turtle grease, armlets, stone axes, cooking utensils, and tropical fruits and vegetables and bride-price. Moore states that trade “For these goods a single would usually suffice, but even then it was never a straight barter, since the transaction involved a whole string of relationship along the way” to suggest that it is a connected system within a system. (1989, p. 46) According to Hughes:

It is not correct to describe a segment of the wider trading network as ‘a trading system’ if it is distinguished by area alone. A trading system must have unique systemic characteristics. Where specialised merchants exist, such as coastal canoe traders, it is meaningful to describe their set of delimited movements as a system within a system. (1973, p. 121)

Network and Cultural Connection

The transmission of traditional history throughout Torres Strait Islanders’ existence reinforced Islanders’ beliefs in the internal dynamics of customary exchange; when explained from a Torres Strait Islander worldview these provide a different viewpoint on how to consider the cultural ways of the Islands and its people. The many theories and hypothesis provided by outsider scholars about Torres Strait have been shaped by their Western understandings. Torres Strait Islanders, through the process of traditional education, have an understanding that allows them to interpret meanings and to encompass a range of beliefs in order to make their world knowable. Ideologically, Islanders’ religious understandings and specifically their techniques for mastering their environment on land and sea came from the teachings gifted to them

by their ancestors.

It may be viewed as being similar to views of Flood who argued, “In the same way that archaeology has revealed material traces of the oral traditions enshrined in Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey or the Old Testament stories of the Bible” (1983, p. 30). I can relate to this to my argument about how I interpret my peoples’ oral history in terms of the cultural relationships Torres Strait Islanders had with their significant others, in this case, their peripheral customary partners.

In this case, we may visualise the interconnectedness of oral history through the Islanders’ myths and legends and how they were interpreted by Torres Strait Islanders for a basic ways of living different from others whose have acquired theirs by other means. For the Islanders, their myths and legends are the fundamental building blocks of the Islander way of life, with a culture whose environment contains sea/land and reef formations linking Islanders culturally with their ancestors whose mythical powers had established the Islands’ traditions. Thus, when considering Malinowski’s definition of culture, we find that:

Culture, that is, the whole body of implements, the charters of its social group, human ideas, beliefs, and customs, constitutes a vast apparatus by which man is put in a position the better to cope with the concrete, specific problems, which face him in his adaptation to his environment. (1945, p. 42)

In Torres Strait, Islanders practise culture in dissimilarity from other Islanders on each of the inhabited Islands; it is not one culture. Thus cultural difference made possible the linking of traditional trade between Torres Strait Islanders from the different Islands. Each Island group had customary roles in exchange of specific goods with their trade partners on the Australian mainland at Cape York and Papua New Guinea, (Lawrence 1994). And, Macgregor (1911, p. 4), during his research on the Islanders’ trading links, made an assessment on the effect on the people of Mer:

Formerly Murray Island had a brisk trade with the New Guinea coast from the Fly River westward. This was carried out directly, but was conducted by a privileged tribe at Murray Island through Darnley Island, and then by Darnley through Warrior Island. In this tedious and round about way the Murray Islanders obtained their canoes from New Guinea, and the Papuans obtained their shell ornaments. But all has been brought to an end by the Customs barrier that has been rigidly maintained during the last half score years between the Commonwealth and Papua. This rupture of ancient intercourse has been much felt at Murray Island, and at other places in the Straits. (Macgregor 1911, p. 4)

Thus, in contemplating the conception of the myths and legends of Torres Strait encompassed in their distinct environmental setting, it is a traditional way for the development of Islander society and in particular, the fluidity of Island culture, (see traditional trade maps by Lawrence; Figure 19 and 20). Moreover, when we take into account oral history from other Indigenous societies, they make known strong connections that identify them with their traditional environment. As an example in my 1998 assessment of the Islander situation, I set out to:

Describe and situate the Torres Strait Islands in a manner that provides the reader with evidence and materials [in particular], it is worthwhile to note that “Islands” in general provide a very different environment for the development of societies and their cultures, as has been noted by many anthropologists.” (Pitt 1998, p. 16)

The trade maps depict an exchange environment in which Islanders developed their culture. It enabled them to exchange goods through a common bond of alliance and kinship and their pattern of exchange compliments the broad description in contemporary and traditional cultures, “The distribution of wealth within a society is the result of processes of exchange: reciprocity, redistribution and market exchange [consisting of] different rules and effects on the people involved” (Howard 1988, p. 147). From an outsiders’ perspective on the development of the Islanders exchange system:

It is difficult to reconstruct the specific exchange contents were not recorded in the historical documentary literature and social, economic and cultural changes have been considerable, [and these] historical evidence must be seen in the context in which it was written. (Lawrence 1991, p. 23)³¹

In relation to the Islander’s “internal dynamics of exchange system”, Sharp’s interpretation of the Islander’s oral history is about, “The myths which brought them together by turning round the dangers of the wild into a named world made voyages possible across storm prone waters” [and] “The voyagers travelled the tracks of their mythical heroes” (Sharp 1993, p. 33). The “tracks of the mythical heroes” set the pattern for the exchange of implanted ifts that created a greater diversity in the

³¹ Lawrence (1991) in his examination of the extensiveness of the traditional trade Torres Strait Islanders had with their neighbours, found an intricate pattern of trade channels flowing goods through the different cultural Island groups in trade items of exchange with the Cape York Aborigines and the southern coast New Guinean tribes. Lawrence produced a number of maps of sea routes for transporting the items of exchange passing between and from the different cultural groups of Islands in the Strait to their trading partners. (See Lawrence’s Maps as example).

Figure 19: Torres Strait trade route map 1

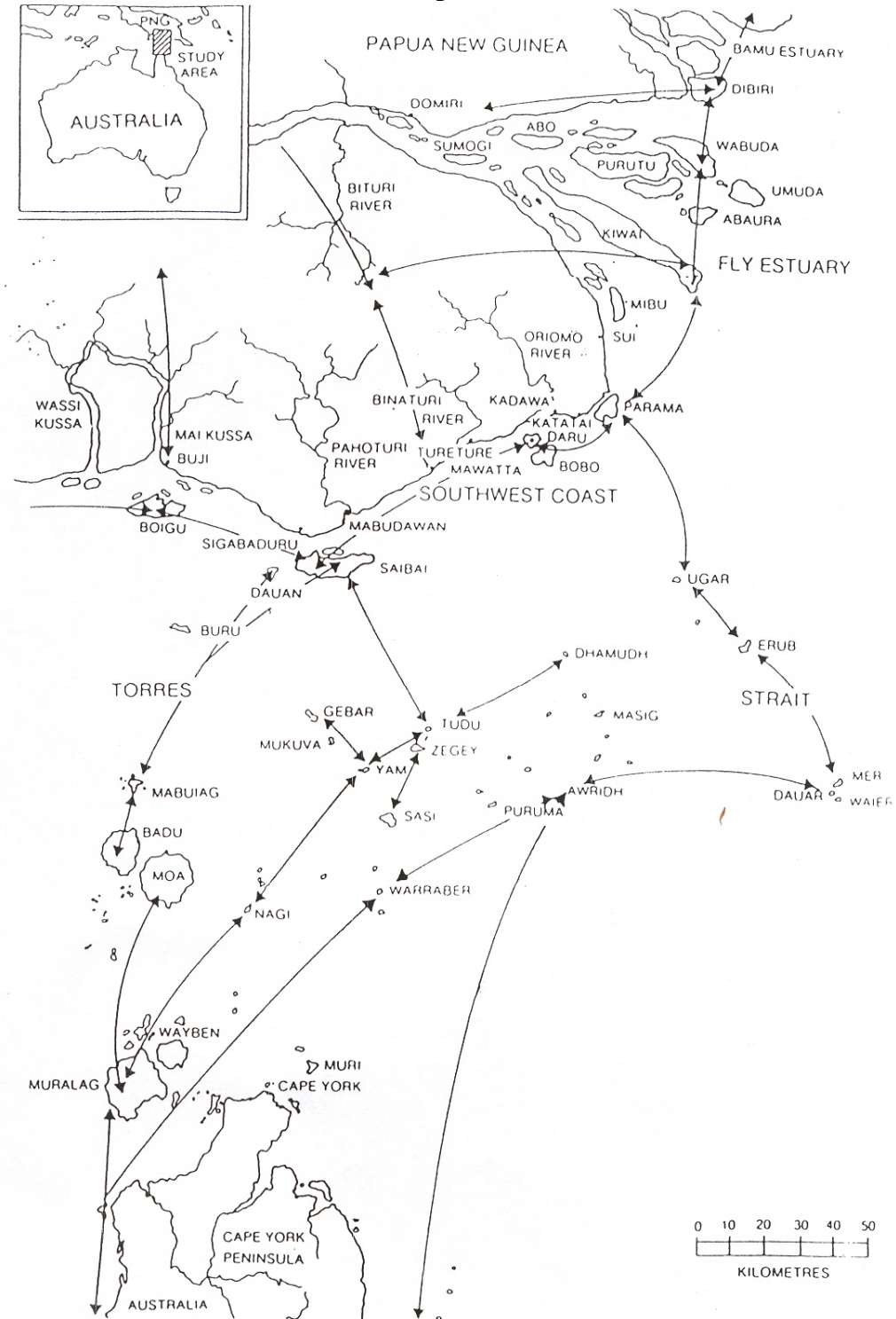


FIG. 29 Patterns of customary exchange (McCarthy, 1939).
(Lawrence 1994, p.284)

Figure 20: Torres Strait trade route map 2

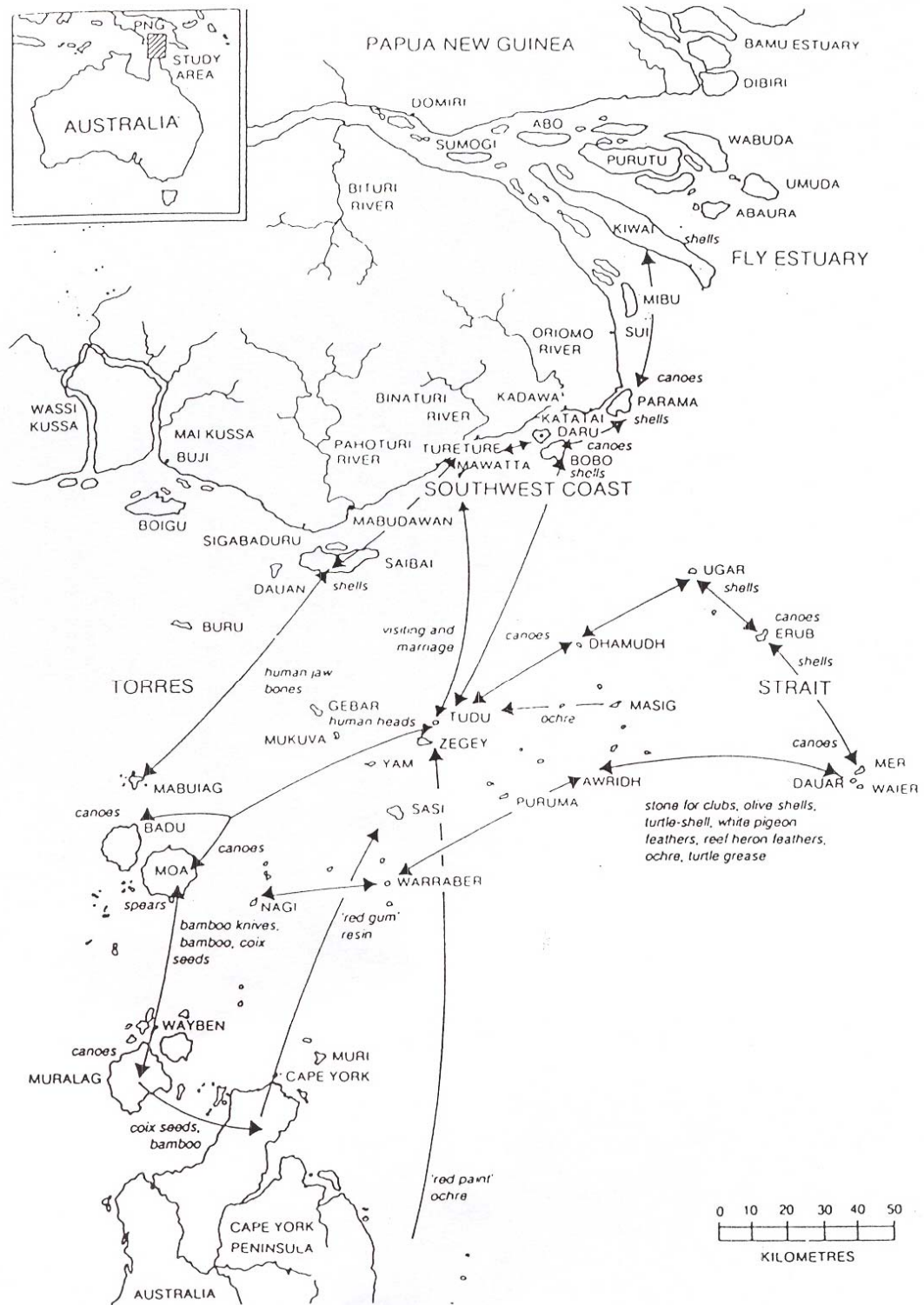


FIG. 26 Patterns of customary exchange (Haddon, 1935.1).
(Lawrence 1994, p. 277)

range of economic resources and cultural continuity for the different Island groups within the culture area. According to Marcus and Fisher (1986, p. 24) in relation to ethnography and interpretive anthropology:

The function of ethnography is certainly not outmoded just because its enduring narrative motifs have worn thin. The cultures of world peoples need to be constantly rediscovered as these peoples reinvent them in changing historical circumstances, especially at a time when confident metanarratives or paradigms are lacking: as we noted, ours is an era of “postconditions”—postmodern, postcolonial, [and] posttraditional.

In conclusion, the traditional stories of the Island are significantly embedded in the myths and legends of Islanders so that Moore perceived “The trading system in the Torres Strait was not a formalised ceremonial exercise [but] a system depended on total honesty” (Moore 1989, p. 48). In a recent analysis of the Torres Strait archival records, Lawrence wrote:

The historical literature [particularly that of Haddon, 1904] reinforced early ideas that customary exchange relations across the Torres Strait were part of a formalised system of set ‘trade routes’ [and] Linkages that shows islands connected in an extensive networks by single fixed lines [by] extending from Australia to Papua New Guinea [and] oral evidence shows that the customary system was flexible and open, and tied to many social, political and cultural factors [and] these links between kin and friends transcended linguistic and political divisions. (Lawrence 1991, p. 23)

In this study, the literature supports my notion of the importance of considering oral history from a Torres Strait Islander point of view. I have produced evidence from those academics who have made Torres Strait and its people the study of their ethnographic interests and who have taken into account the resource materials of others for their global perspectives. Thus, when we interpret history from a Western perception we recognise that there are such things as oral testimony or hearsay that have been used to record history, as Vansina tells us that “A testimony could only described as having this aim, it was exclusively intended to convey information about events in the past in order to enrich our knowledge of the past” (1965, p. 48).

It is within the context of oral history that I bring the history of my people to others for their consideration of how Islanders view their world. Presenting the Islander history in a culturally appropriate way, as coming from Torres Strait Islanders themselves, makes this chapter a historical event for Islanders according to tradition and relaying it so that we learn about the past through the memories of others.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study has been to contribute knowledge through a holistic approach about Torres Strait Islanders and social change and in particular, to provide an understanding of the Islanders' own position within the context of "development". It is a brief history discussed in analytical segments comprising the five chapters. It examines the Islanders' ongoing quest for autonomy by shifting through the history of development in Torres Strait. My interpretation of the Islanders' history is that it is compounded by the problem of identity and its meaning through the use of cultural practices and symbols as "Ailan Kustom" for administrative purposes. The outcome is that cultural breakdowns and diversionary colonial influences stop Torres Strait Islanders from achieving a common goal for themselves. I have found the process to be confusing for many Islanders, in particular, for those who are unhappy with their current situation, where a partial and incomplete form of self-management has been granted by the State and Commonwealth Governments. The thesis is my attempt to develop an analysis of Islanders' history so that others can draw their own conclusions as to why Torres Strait Islanders in their own territory have remained economically unproductive. It has made me examine the forces of modernisation from outside the region and question the inner workings of the diverse systems of administration. This situation has evolved throughout the imposition of institutions external to Torres Strait and has been introduced for political reasons to satisfy the needs of the state.

The significance of this study is to examine these changes from outside and inside, and the inter-related impediments my people in Torres Strait have been confronted with in a process that has made progress towards Torres Strait Islanders' self-determination more difficult. At the same time, it puts a perspective focusing on the present governance of the region and the irreconcilable roles of Islander representatives working within government agencies and the total control of administration in the region. It draws attention to the early intervention of a colonial style of authority that involved Islanders in specific roles as traditional appointees to administer and implement "new ways" to organize and manage their Islander constituents.

The acceptance of initial change is seen through the behaviour of Islander leadership

that directed and permitted Islanders to continue their way of life, to work and live an assumed traditional lifestyle organised into their customary estates but in the interest of outsiders. It considers Torres Strait Islanders today to be still living in a colonial period of development, dependent on governments' assistance, whilst living in a resource rich maritime environment. It makes the argument that what Islanders lacked in pre-colonial times they were able to acquire by trading relations that linked both what is now Papua-New Guinea and Cape York on the Australian mainland. They lived on a crossroad of trade and exchange with links also to Asia and the Pacific and with the intervention of cultures from outside and, when the Islands became incorporated into the outside world, Islander lifestyle changed to accommodate these new conditions. These were the forces of "development" or "control" that were applied, using strength and success to hinder Islanders' advancement by indirect processes. The study focused on cultural change in Torres Strait that did not come from inside an Island community but, as a result from the intermarriages of Islanders with people from other groups and rapid culture contact that brought in significant change (social progress) in various ways to Torres Strait Islanders. Overall, the study has placed Torres Strait Islanders amongst the colonised people of the world, those whose traditional economies have been displaced to make way for development. This problem has been compounded by the disparity between the historical and anthropological accounts of outsiders' accounts and Islanders' own experiences of the historical and cultural changes that have overtaken them. It constructs a historical history of Torres Strait Islanders who struggled for control despite colonial impediments, such as the practice of using Islander labour for production and local knowledge. In the name of progress, Islanders were reduced to being a source of supply as labour in an ever expanding capitalist economy that had its centre of gravity elsewhere. It was necessary to examine the history of political development of the Islands, which I referred to as "representivity" and "progress" to comprehend the Islanders' history as unique in regards to social change. The current system of administration has weakened the Islanders' ability for self-determination and kept them as recipients of passive welfare in community development schemes funded by what many continue to see as 'outside' governments.

The study provides a broad overview of the effects of Australian and Queensland colonial control, and even now, in a period of quasi-autonomy, being managed by

“representative governance”, the Islands’ underdeveloped state continues to be treated as a resource for the primary benefit of external developers. The study looks at the various types of “representivity”, under Islander leadership including how those who are currently in office are made into the political channels through which acceptance of policies of control and acting accordingly within their constraints is to the outside governments. It examines the introduction of Christianity and its impact in a series of social change that saw Islanders’ traditional cultural beliefs and meanings came to be devalued. From the oral accounts of Islanders, it becomes clear that Islander culture was often displaced symbolically and literally as a symbol through evangelisation and modern education. In many instances, traditional belief and custom have continued for many as a kind of shadow of a remembered past and that knowledge of the past is often from some of the written accounts of outsiders. However, those who have little understanding of the traditional cultural matrix of Islander culture can present it in ways that devalue and stereotype it.

In my study, I have demonstrated oral tradition to be an important system of communication. Torres Strait Islanders have used it to preserve and pass on their knowledge and meaning of culture, heritage and identity. This study was initiated, in part, to stimulate local consciousness as Islanders in Torres Strait struggle to understand the relevance of both the processes of social change and the consequences of social change. It may assist my people in the Islands to come to an informed understanding of the nature of the explanations and justifications of present policy directions in their culturally complex and rapidly changing world.

This thesis demonstrates to the people of Torres Strait and others that colonial incorporation has both destructive and constructive aspects. Knowledge is a means to understand that process that is vital for the future advancement of Islanders as global citizens, rather than as a minority on welfare at the margins of the Australian Commonwealth. The method, by which the thesis was constructed, reveals a history that is vital to comprehend recent political strategies towards a more autonomous system of administration. While local elected leaders are nominally representative of their people they, in fact, become the channels for incorporating the Islands and its people into an administrative system in the interests of governments and its agencies, that have control over fiscal resources. Islanders are kept in a subordinated position.

The study has made a case for understanding the central roles of “representivity” interpreted as “development” over a period of continual representation by Islanders of their constituents (Torres Strait Islanders) to governments. It interpreted the process by which representation and its methods usefully described as advising governments how to modify their control over Torres Strait, to constrain local leaders and to limit their abilities to promote Islander independence against welfare colonialism (Beckett 1987, p. 198). Inevitably, the experiences of internal bureaucracy by Islander representatives have provided privileges through the practice of securing ex-departmental advisors for advice on the delivery of government programs from which they draw their decisions, rather than being drawn in or let them being controlled by outsiders.

The historical process cannot be undone. For both the older and younger generations seeking new ways of both living in harmony with their traditions, and facing the challenges of developing real futures, the present is where they are at this moment. Reform and renewal can only take place with an honest and realistic understanding of resources available to them in the context of life encompassed in a rapidly changing and globalised world system. In the current political climate, Torres Strait Islander culture has drifted from its foundation in tradition to become a patchwork culture in everyday life. Globalisation contains the paradox that just as it causes the old traditional points of cultural reference to disappear it seems to reawaken in Islanders passionate affirmations of their identity that often verge on seeking a future of self-exclusion from the wider political system because there is no choice as to how to use their cultural values for their own advantage in a rapidly changing world. By taking this into consideration, I refer back to where I began: Torres Strait Islanders find themselves largely economically unproductive while their political representatives continue to represent Islander interests to governments and others, through planning and policy control, in ways that keep them economically dependent on the state’s welfare system. The system of governance has made these representatives less than effective in pursuing a fairer future for Islander self-determination.

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